



What Changed When Everything Changed

Joseph Margulies

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Beautifully written and carefully reasoned, this bold and provocative work upends the conventional wisdom about the American reaction to crisis. Margulies demonstrates that for key elements of the post-9/11 landscape—especially support for counterterror policies like torture and hostility to Islam—American identity is not only darker than it was before September 11, 2001, but substantially more repressive than it was immediately after the attacks. These repressive attitudes, Margulies shows us, have taken hold even as the terrorist threat has diminished significantly.

Contrary to what is widely imagined, at the moment of greatest perceived threat, when the fear of another attack "hung over the country like a shroud," favorable attitudes toward Muslims and Islam were at record highs, and the suggestion that America should torture was denounced in the public square. Only much later did it become socially acceptable to favor "enhanced interrogation" and exhibit clear anti-Muslim prejudice. Margulies accounts for this unexpected turn and explains what it means to the nation's identity as it moves beyond 9/11. We express our values in the same language, but that language can hide profound differences and radical changes in what we actually believe. "National identity," he writes, "is not fixed, it is made."



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