

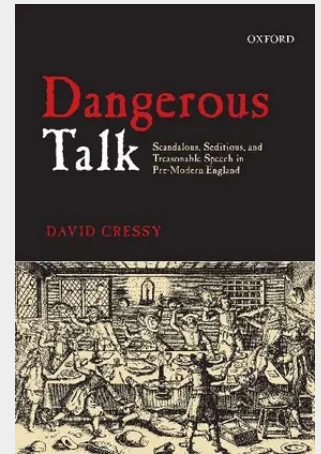
Cressy

Dangerous Talk

Scandalous, Seditious, and Treasonable Speech in Pre-Modern England

Dangerous Talk examines the 'lewd, ungracious, detestable, opprobrious, and rebellious-sounding' speech of ordinary men and women who spoke scornfully of kings and queens. Eavesdropping on lost conversations, it reveals the expressions that got people into trouble, and follows the fate of some of the offenders. Introducing stories and characters previously unknown to history, David Cressy explores the contested zones where private words had public consequence. Though 'words were but wind', as the proverb had it, malicious tongues caused social damage, seditious words challenged political authority, and treasonous speech imperilled the crown. Royal regimes from the house of Plantagenet to the house of Hanover coped variously with 'crimes of the tongue' and found ways to monitor talk they deemed dangerous. Their response involved policing and surveillance, judicial intervention, political propaganda, and the crafting of new law. In early Tudor times to speak ill of the monarch could risk execution. By the end of the Stuart era similar words could be dismissed with a shrug. This book traces the development of free speech across five centuries of popular political culture, and shows how scandalous, seditious and treasonable talk finally gained protection as 'the birthright of an Englishman'. The lively and accessible work of a prize-winning social historian, it offers fresh insight into pre-modern society, the politics of language, and the social impact of the law.

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