



The Myth of Fascism

Napoleon Bonaparte once said, “History is a series of agreed-upon myths.” I’m not quite that cynical, but our history books do sometimes seem more like mythology than reality. In fact, in school we don’t even call the subject “history” anymore but “social studies” (socialist studies?). Yes, the victors write the history, and it’s pretty easy to see who has been winning the culture war for the last 100-odd years.

“You’re a fascist!”

It’s an accusation so common that I can only paraphrase Helter Skelter figure Charles Manson’s remarks about being “crazy” and say, there was a time when being a fascist meant something; nowadays *everybody’s* a fascist. Why, even the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, a source not generally known for hyperbole or any discernable sense of humor, has the following statement under the [entry](#) “fascism”: “1922, originally used in English 1920 in its Italian form (see fascist). Applied to similar groups in Germany from 1923; applied to everyone since the rise of the Internet.” Unfortunately, though, the term’s sloppy application didn’t start with the virtual world. It started with virtual history.



If those commonly known as historians are right, Germany’s Adolf Hitler, Italy’s Benito Mussolini, and Spain’s Francisco Franco all were fascists, despite the fact that their regimes were very different ideologically. Hitler was a National Socialist, a eugenicist, a racist, and an anti-Judeo-Christian who advanced neo-paganism and perpetrated genocide. Mussolini had been a socialist, was certainly a statist during his dominance, was anti-papal, but was not genocidal; in fact, he had no racial agenda until he took a leaf out of Hitler’s book 16 years into his rule. Moreover, [writes](#) WorldHistoryOnline.org, “When he [Mussolini] finally introduced the anti-Semitic laws and declared Italians the descendants of the “Aryan race” in 1938, they were perceived as un-Italian and even *un-Fascist* [emphasis added].” Likewise, Franco had neither genocidal tendencies nor a racial agenda.

Yet Franco was even more different from the other two leaders than they were from each other. While Hitler and Mussolini were apostates of the Catholic Church, the Spanish general considered himself a faithful Catholic. In fact, when Franco launched his military coup in 1936, it was against leftist Spanish republicans who demanded public renunciation of the Catholic faith as a requirement for a civil



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marriage and who would kill priests and nuns on a massive scale (known as the Red Terror). While Hitler and Mussolini were revolutionaries who looked to a pagan past, Franco was a traditionalist who sought to preserve the Christian present.

The reality is that there is little, if any, basis on which to lump the three leaders into the same ideological category. Sure, we're told that a hallmark of fascism is authoritarianism, and all three men were dictators. But so were most leaders throughout history. The three were anti-communist, but so were virtually all American politicians (until recently, anyway). We're told that fascists are expansionist, and Hitler and Mussolini certainly were. But so were Napoleon, Caesar, Attila, the Western colonial powers, the Soviets and the majority of major civilizations that ever existed; being so is, after all, generally how you become a major civilization. Franco, however, had no ambitions beyond traditional Spanish holdings. Note that Franco remained neutral during WWII and even refused the Germans right of passage when, in 1940, they wanted to strike Gibraltar via land.

But what about that other hallmark of fascism: nationalism? Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco were all nationalistic. But so were the Soviets. So are today's pseudo-communist Chinese and the devotedly Red North Koreans. Like authoritarianism and expansionism, nationalism is a historical norm. It's a type of tribalism and comes almost as naturally to man as does family patriotism.

Of course, Hitler and Mussolini were allied during WWII, and Franco received aid from both of them during the Spanish Civil War. Yet the Italian leader had initially allied himself with Britain and France through an agreement known as the [Stresa Front](#), which was designed to *check German power*. Moreover, we Americans were allied with the Soviets during WWII, but that didn't make us communists any more than it made them free marketeers. Like authoritarianism, expansionism, and nationalism, politics' — and wars' — capacity to make strange bedfellows has long been a fact of history.

So what is "fascism"? Of course, words are manipulated almost as much as — and usually for the purposes of manipulating — people, and note here that the victors write the dictionaries as well. So perhaps we should go to the source.

Both the word and concept of "fascism" were originated in Italy. Again, from the Etymology dictionary, under the [heading](#) "fascist":

1921, from It. *partito nazionale fascista*, the anti-communist political movement organized [in] 1919 under Benito Mussolini (1883-1945); from It. *fascio* "group, association...." *Fasci* "groups of men organized for political purposes" had been a feature of Sicily since c.1895....

Delving deeper, these words are derived from the Latin word "fasces." The Etymology source [tells us](#):

[F]asces "bundle of rods containing an axe with the blade projecting...." Carried before a lictor, a superior Roman magistrate, as a symbol of power over life and limb: the sticks symbolized punishment by whipping, the axe head execution by beheading.

Power-hungry Mussolini used the fasces as a symbol of his regime, and, given that he dreamt of resurrecting the glories of the Roman Empire, it's not surprising he did so. But the point is that "fascism," as it refers to something distinct and unique, was an Italian invention and phenomenon that simply wasn't replicated anywhere else. Any other usage is imprecise, ill-defined, and ideologically driven.

It's stating the obvious to say that if Mussolini and his fellow travelers had never existed, there is absolutely no possibility that Hitler and Franco, not to mention anyone merely politically incorrect,



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would have been labeled with the Latin/Italian-derived term in question. The ephemeral reality of fascism would never have been — and neither would the enduring word and myth of it.

So what is “fascism” today? The most accurate definition is “a non-leftist system of government that leftists don’t happen to like.” Franco, for instance, was about as fascist as Charlemagne or Napoleon — and far less expansionistic. But Charlemagne fought only pagans, Muslims, and other Christians; and Napoleon fought other European colonial powers, some Muslims, and invaded a Russia that was still royal and not Red. In contrast, Franco committed the unpardonable sin of vanquishing a Spanish republican coalition of communists, socialists, and other assorted leftists whose death squads were partially staffed by Soviet secret police. In a much earlier time, he would have been regarded merely as a fairly unremarkable strongman. And, if the conquerors of old had existed in modern times — and especially if they had locked horns with socialists — it’s hard to imagine many of them escaping the label “fascist.”

You see, the left *needs* the term. After all, leftists have long had a knack for mistaking evil for good. For example, author George Bernard Shaw and *New York Times* Moscow correspondent Walter Duranty were apologists for the Soviets; Shaw also praised Mussolini for his collectivist policies and Mohandas Gandhi called the Italian leader a “superman”; and leftist French author André Gide said that Hitler “behaves like a genius,” to cite just a few examples. The left demonized themselves through this history, so to retain relevance they had to bring the right down to their level. And, obviously, since communism was going to be viewed as a skeleton in their closet no matter what they did, they were going to have to counterbalance it by pinning a different devilish ism on the right. So they took “fascism,” lumped almost every non-communist authoritarian regime into its category, and painted it as a baby of the right. And then the message was, “Okay, w-w-well, well, we have communism — but you have fascism! And your demon child is worse than ours!”

And it makes sense. I mean, right and left.... Each side has its ideology; each side comprises humans; each side makes mistakes. It’s one side of the scale or the other, Fox News fair and balanced. And each side must have a corresponding dark side, right?

That’s one view.

But, then again, maybe our provisional terms “right” and “left,” which originated with the French Revolution and refer to different things depending on the time and place, are like fascism: Perhaps they just confuse minds and obscure Truth.

Maybe there just is good and evil.



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