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## Fascism: A Counter-History

Gabriel Rockhill

### **Abstract**

This series proposes a counter-history of fascism from a Marxist perspective. The first article, “Fascism: Now You See It, Now You Don’t!” examines the ideology of fascist exceptionalism, which attempts to reduce fascism to a single place and time—Italy and Germany in the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century—in order to dissimulate its broad and deep historical role, sometimes under different names, in imposing and maintaining capitalist socioeconomic relations (as George Jackson, Domenico Losurdo, Aimé Césaire and others have argued). After elucidating and critically dismantling the perception management inherent in this logic of fascist exceptionalism, the second article “Liberalism and Fascism: Partners in Crime,” takes on the logic of false antagonisms inherent in the purported opposition between liberalism and fascism. It demonstrates how the classic examples of fascism in Europe arose *within* the institutional framework of bourgeois democracy and that liberalism thus provided no bulwark against the fascist capture of state power (*au contraire*). The next article critically examines one of the most recalcitrant myths of the contemporary world order, namely that the United States, a self-declared liberal democracy, defeated fascism in WWII. Drawing on the well-documented history of the U.S. National Security State, it demonstrates that the new global hegemon actually internationalized fascism through the semi-clandestine construction of a global network of anti-communist fascist militants and leaders (from the stay-behind armies in Europe and Operation Paperclip in the U.S. to the Nazi ratlines to Latin America and the Kishi regime in Japan). The concluding article brings all three of these pieces into conceptual focus by rejecting the one-state-one-government paradigm and advancing a theoretical framework within which liberalism and fascism are understood as modes of governance that often operate simultaneously within the same state, but that target different populations and are unequally distributed across space and time. It is in this light that I conclude by proposing an analogy with the good cop / bad cop interrogation tactic: wherever the good, liberal cop is incapable of cajoling the population into acquiescence to capitalist socioeconomic relations, the bad cop is always on call for imposing them by force. This ultimately means, then, that fascism should not be understood simply as an external or future threat to liberal democracies, according to the logic of faraway fascism, but rather as a mode of governance that is integral to capitalist rule. It is, in short, a reality, not a threat—but a reality that can more easily perpetuate itself and expand if we remain blind to how it operates and how best to organize against it.

# Fascism: Now You See It, Now You Don't!

Gabriel Rockhill

“We need to understand that, contrary to what we are told by the U.S. media, fascism is not an extreme development, limited in time and place, that occurred a long time ago. Quite the contrary. Fascism is extended, generalized, and exists everywhere.”

Vicente Navarro

Only one country in the world has, in recent history:

- endeavored to overthrow more than 50 foreign governments
- established an intelligence agency that killed at least 6 million people in the first 40 years of its existence
- developed a draconian police-vigilante network to destroy any domestic political movements that challenged its dominion
- constructed a mass incarceration system that cages a greater percentage of the population than any other country in the world, and which is embedded within a global secret prison network and torture regime.

Whereas *democracy* is the common term used to describe this country, we learn that *fascism* only occurred once in history, in one place, and that it was defeated by the aforementioned democracy.

The expansiveness and elasticity of the notion of *democracy* could not contrast more starkly with the narrowness and rigidity of the concept of *fascism*. After all, we are told that democracy was born some 2500 years ago and that it is a defining feature of European civilization, and even one of its unique cultural contributions to world history. Fascism, by contrast, purportedly erupted in Western Europe in the interwar period as an aberrant anomaly, temporarily interrupting the progressive march of history, right after a war had been fought to make the world ‘safe for democracy.’ Once a second world war destroyed it, or so the narrative goes, the forces of good then set about taming its evil ‘totalitarian’ twin in the East in the name of democratic globalization.

As value-concepts whose substantive content is much less important than their normative charge, democracy has been perpetually expanded, whereas fascism is constantly constricted. The Holocaust industry has played no small part in this process through its endeavors to singularize the Nazi war atrocities to such an extent that they literally become incomparable or even ‘unrepresentable,’ while the purportedly democratic forces of good in the world are repeatedly held up for emulation as the model for global governance.

## **Concepts-in-Class-Struggle**

The ongoing debate over the precise definition of fascism has frequently obscured the fact that the nature and function of definitions differ significantly depending on the epistemology employed, meaning the overall framework of knowledge and truth. For historical materialists, concepts like fascism are sites of class struggle rather than quasi metaphysical entities with fixed properties. The search for a universally acceptable definition of a generic concept of fascism is therefore quixotic. This is not, however, because concepts are relative in a purely subjectivist sense, meaning that everyone simply has their own, idiosyncratic definition of such notions. It is that they are relational in a concrete, material sense: they are objectively situated in class struggles.

It is bourgeois ideology that presumes the existence of a universal epistemology outside of class struggle. It acts as if there was only one concept of each social phenomenon, which corresponds of course to the bourgeois understanding of the phenomenon in question. What this ultimately means, from a materialist perspective, is that the bourgeois ideology inherent in the very idea of a universal epistemology is itself part of class struggle insofar as it surreptitiously endeavors to disappear all rival epistemologies.

If we dig deeper into the differences between these two epistemologies, which are rival accounts of the very function of concepts and their definitions, we see that materialists—in stark contrast to the idealism of bourgeois ideology—understand ideas to be practical tools of analysis that allow for different levels of abstraction, and whose use-value depends on their ability to map material situations whose complexity surpasses their own. Within this framework, the goal is not to define the essence of a social phenomenon like fascism in a manner that could be universally accepted by bourgeois social science, but rather to develop a working definition in two senses. On the one hand, this is a definition that works because it has a practical use-value: it provides a coherent outline of a complex field of material forces and can help orient us in a world of struggle. On the other hand, such a definition is understood to be heuristic and open to further elaboration because Marxists recognize that they are subjectively situated in objective sociohistorical processes, and that changes in perspective and scale might require modifying it. This can be clearly seen in the three different scales that I will use for developing a working definition of fascism: the conjunctural, the structural and the systemic.

## **Multi-Scalar Analysis**

The historical materialist approach to fascism accords a primacy to practices, and it situates them in relationship to the social totality, which itself is analyzed through heuristically distinct but interlocking scales. The conjunctural, to begin with, is the social totality of a specific place and time, such as Italy or Germany in the interwar period. Historically speaking, we know that the term fascism emerged as a description of Benito Mussolini's particular brand of organizing, but that it was only theorized gradually, in fits and starts. In other words, it did not appear as a doctrine or coherent political ideology that was then implemented, but rather as a rough and loose description of a dynamic set

of practices that changed over time (early on, unlike later, fascism in Italy was reformist and republican, advocated for women's suffrage, supported some limited pro-labor reforms, feuded with the Catholic Church, and was not openly racist).

It was only after the fascist movement had evolved and began to gain power that attempts were made by Mussolini and others to retroactively consolidate their disparate and shifting practices in such a way that they could be presented as fitting within a coherent doctrine. On numerous occasions, Mussolini himself insisted on this point, [writing](#) for instance: "Fascism was not the nursling of a doctrine previously drafted at a desk; it was born of the need of action, and was action; it was not a party but, in the first two years, an anti-party and a movement." José Carlos Mariátegui has provided [an insightful, fine-grained analysis](#) of the internal struggles operative early on in the Italian fascist movement, which was polarized between an extremist faction and a reformist camp with liberal leanings. Mussolini, according to Mariátegui, occupied a centrist position and avoided unduly favoring one group over the other until 1924, when the socialist politician Giacomo Matteotti was assassinated by fascists. This brought the battle between the two fascist cliques to a fever pitch, and Mussolini was ultimately forced to choose. After making an unsuccessful overture to the liberal wing, he sided with the reactionaries.

Since its inception, then, the concept of fascism has been a site of social and ideological struggle, if it be the clash between extremists and reformists within the fascist camp, or more generally between fascists and liberals within the capitalist camp. These conflicts were themselves ultimately nested within the overall conflict between capitalists and anti-capitalists. It is from this vantage point of interlocking levels of struggle that we can establish a first working definition of fascism, once it came to be more or less consolidated, by identifying how it emerged within a very specific conjuncture and stage of global class warfare. In the threatening wake of the Russian Revolution (which was followed by failed revolutions in Europe and later the Great Depression in the capitalist world), Mussolini and his ilk used mass communications and propaganda to slowly but surely mobilize sectors of civil society—and particularly the petty-bourgeoisie—with the backing of big industrial capitalists, around a nationalist and colonial ideology of 'radical' transformation in order to crush the workers movement and launch wars of conquest. At this level of analysis, fascism is practically speaking, in the [words of Michael Parenti](#), "nothing more than a final solution to the class struggle, the totalistic submergence and exploitation of democratic forces for the benefit and profit of higher financial circles. Fascism is a false revolution."

This conjunctural analysis is, of course, markedly distinct from liberal accounts of fascism, which tend to focus on surface phenomena and superstructural elements that are severed from any scientific consideration of international political economy and class warfare. If it be a politics of hate, a logic of 'us and them,' a rejection of parliamentary democracy, a question of aberrant personalities, a dismissal of science, or other such characteristics, the liberal approach to fascism is preoccupied with epiphenomenal traits at the expense of the social totality. It is the latter, however, that gives these traits—when they do in fact exist in some form or other—their precise meaning and function. It is worth recalling, in

this regard, as Martin Kitchen [pointed out](#), that “all capitalist-countries produced fascist movements after the crash in 1929.”

If the bourgeois concept of fascism obscures the social totality of the conjuncture within which European fascism historically emerged under that name, it casts an even longer shadow over the structural and the systemic dimensions of fascism as a practice. As we shall see in the case of George Jackson, Marxists have insisted on the importance of inscribing the conjunctural analysis of European fascism within a structural framework in order to reveal the forms of fascism operative within conjunctures where liberal theorists often claim they either do not exist at all or they are somehow less severe. The interwar period in the United States, for instance, when compared to what was going on in Italy and Germany, reveals striking structural similarities, as we will see.

Finally, the broadest scale of analysis, which appears to be invisible to liberals, is the capitalist world system. As historical materialists like Aimé Césaire and Domenico Losurdo have argued, the barbarism of the Nazis should be understood as a specific manifestation of the long and deep history of colonial butchery, which has brought capitalism to every corner of the globe. If there is something exceptional about Nazism, [Césaire claimed](#), it is that concentration camps were being built in Europe instead of in the colonies. In this way, he invites us to situate the conjunctural and structural scales of analysis within a systemic framework, meaning one that accounts for the entire global history of capitalism.

The bourgeois concept of fascism seeks to singularize it as an idiosyncratic phenomenon, which is largely or entirely superstructural, in order to foreclose any examination of its ubiquitous presence within the history of the capitalist world order. In contrast, the historical materialist approach proposes a multi-scalar analysis of the social totality in order to demonstrate how the conjunctural specificity of interwar European fascism can best be understood as nested within a structural phase of capitalist class warfare, and ultimately within the systemic history of capital, which came into the world—in [the words used by Karl Marx](#) to describe primitive accumulation—“dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt.” As one scales out or in, the precise account and operative definition of fascism can change because of the material variables involved, and some have therefore preferred to restrict the term *fascism* to its conjunctural manifestations (which can, at times, be useful for the sake of clarity). However, even if the latter tactic is used, a full analysis of fascism within the social totality ultimately requires an integrated account in which it is recognized that the conjunctural is situated within the structural, which is in turn embedded within the systemic. Fascism, as a practice, is a product of the capitalist system, whose precise forms vary depending on the structural phase of capitalist development and the specific sociohistorical conjuncture.

### **The Ideology of Fascist Exceptionalism**

Simone de Beauvoir [once quipped](#) that “in bourgeois language, the word *man* means a bourgeois.” Indeed, when the members of the colonial ruling class known as the American

founding fathers sent forth their solemn declaration to the world that “all men are created equal,” they did not mean that all human beings were actually equal. It is only by understanding their unstated premise—that *man* means *bourgeois*—that we can fully comprehend their intent: the non-humans of the world can be subjected to the most brutal forms of dispossession, enslavement and colonial carnage.

This duplicitous operation, by which a particular (the bourgeoisie) attempts to pass itself off as the universal (humanity), is a well-known characteristic of bourgeois ideology. Its inverted form, however, is perhaps even more deceptive and insidious, because it has not—to my knowledge—been widely diagnosed. Rather than universalizing the particular, this ideological operation transforms the systemic into the sporadic, the structural into the singular, the conjunctural into the idiosyncratic.

The case of fascism is exemplary. Whenever its name is invoked, we are ritualistically redirected by the dominant ideology to the same set of specific historical examples in Italy and Germany, which are supposed to serve as the general standards by which to judge any other possible manifestations of fascism. According to the most un-scientific of methodologies, it is the particular that governs the universal, rather than the other way around. In its most extreme ideological form, this means that if there are no jackboots, *Sieg Heil* salutes and goose-stepping soldiers, then we cannot possibly be within what is commonly known as fascism.

This ideology of fascist exceptionalism is a natural outgrowth of the bourgeois notion of fascism. By conceptualizing Germano-Italian fascism as *sui generis* and defining it primarily in terms of its epiphenomenal characteristics, it severs it from its deep roots in the capitalist system, and it obfuscates structural parallels with other forms of repressive governance around the world. This ideology thus plays a crucial role in class struggle: it takes a general feature of life under capital and it transforms it into an anomaly, which some have even sought to elevate, in the case of Nazism, to the metaphysical status of being incomparable in its irreducible singularity. The particular thereby serves to mask the general.

### **A Dragon in the Belly of the Beast**

George Jackson stalwartly rejected the ideological particularization of fascism and pointed out all of the structural similarities between European fascism and repression in the United States. Unsurprisingly, a liberal critic once proclaimed that the U.S. was not fascist simply because Jackson said it was, thereby dismissing out of hand his structural analysis as simply a subjective opinion (a classic case of liberal projection). Jackson’s argument, however, was not reducible to an *ex cathedra* pronouncement but was instead based on a careful, materialist comparison between the situation in the United States and the one in Europe. “We are being repressed now,” [he wrote](#). “Courts that dispense no justice and concentration camps are already in existence. There are more secret police in this country than in all others combined—so many that they constitute a whole new class that has attached itself to the power complex. Repression is here.”

When Jackson refers to the U.S. as “the Fourth Reich” and compares American prisons to Dachau and Buchenwald, he is obviously breaking with the exceptionalist protocol that drives the Holocaust industry by elevating European fascism to the singular status of the incomparable. And yet, what he is in effect doing in his analyses of the U.S. is that he is simply rejecting the a-scientific approach to fascism described above, which emphasizes idiosyncrasies in order to obscure structural relations. Instead, he begins the other way around, with a materialist analysis of the modes of governance operative in America, and [here’s what he found](#):

The new corporate state [in the U.S.] has fought its way through crisis after crisis, established its ruling elites in every important institution, formed its partnership with labor through its elites, erected the most massive network of protective agencies replete with spies, technical and animal, to be found in any police state in the world. The violence of the ruling class of this country in the long process of its trend toward authoritarianism and its last and highest stage, fascism, cannot be rivaled in its excesses by any other nation on earth today or in history.

Those who would dismiss this as hyperbole, thereby refusing to even engage in historical comparisons, simply reveal one of the most insidious consequences of the ideology of fascist exceptionalism: any materialist analysis of comparable situations is a priori *verboten*.

Rather than recoiling in horror from the term *fascism*, which has been ideologically reserved for a few, now distant, historical anomalies, or what George Seldes [called](#) “faraway fascism,” Jackson draws the most logical conclusion from the point of view of historical materialist analysis: what’s happening before his eyes in the United States is an intensification and globalization of what transpired, under slightly different conditions, in Italy and Germany. In fact, [he directly identifies](#) the driving forces behind the perception management that attempts to blind us to American fascism as themselves being a cultural product of this very same fascism:

Right behind the expeditionary forces (the pigs) come the missionaries, and the colonial effect is complete. The missionaries, with the benefits of Christendom, school us on the value of symbolism, dead presidents, and the rediscount rate. [...] In the area of culture [...] we are bonded to the fascist society by chains that have strangled our intellect, scrambled our wits, and sent us stumbling backward in a wild, disorganized retreat from reality.

Moreover, Jackson, like other Marxist-Leninists, [identifies](#) the nucleus of fascism in “an economic rearrangement”: “It is international capitalism’s response to the challenge of international scientific socialism.” Its nationalistic garb, [he rightly insists](#), should not distract us from its international ambitions and its colonial drive: “At its core, fascism is capitalistic and capitalism is international. Beneath its nationalist ideological trappings, fascism is always ultimately an international movement.” Jackson thereby responds to the ideological over-inflation of the concept of democracy by extending the notion of fascism to include all of the violence, repression and control operative in the imposition,

maintenance and intensification of capitalist social relations (including the reformist welfare state). Some might prefer to distinguish between this form of general fascism, which would include authoritarian and liberal rule, and a more specific definition of fascism as the extensive use of state and para-state repression for the ultimate purpose of increasing capitalist accumulation. These are not, however, necessarily mutually exclusive definitions since the violence of capitalist social relations takes many different forms—direct repression, economic exploitation, social degradation, hegemonic subjection, etc.—and *this* is what Jackson brings to the fore.

### **Seeing through the Bourgeois Concept of Fascism**

The bourgeois concept of fascism aims at dissimulating its structural and systemic character, as well as the deep material causes operative in its conjunctural emergence, in order to present it as absolutely exceptional, by cordoning it off in a specific time and place that is presented as incomparable in its singularity. It seeks to convince us, at all costs, that fascism is *not* an essential aspect of capitalist rule, but rather an anomaly or an exceptional break with its normal functioning. Moreover, it presents it as far away, burying it in a past that has been overcome by democratic progress, brandishing it as a future threat if people do not conform to the dictates of liberal rule, or sometimes locating it in distant lands that are still too ‘backward’ for democracy.

The materialist approach to fascism refuses the blinders imposed by the perception management inherent in the bourgeois concept, and it clearly identifies the ideological double gesture of capitalist rule: it overinflates and even universalizes its purportedly positive traits, constructing [a mythological history of so-called Western democracy](#), and it erases or particularizes its negative characteristics by making fascism into an idiosyncratic anomaly. By beginning the other way around, historical materialism examines how actually existing capitalism relies—as we will see in the rest of this series—on two modes of governance that function according to the deceptive logic of the good cop / bad cop interrogation tactic: wherever and whenever the good cop is not able to inveigle people into playing by the rules of the capitalist game, the bad cop of fascism is always lurking in the shadows to get the job done by any means necessary. If the latter’s stick appears to be an aberration when compared to the carrot of the good cop, this is only because one has been hoodwinked into believing in the false antagonism between them, which dissimulates the fundamental fact that they are working together toward a common goal. While it is certainly true, from a tactical organizing perspective, that dealing with the histrionics of the good cop is usually far preferable to the barefaced barbarism of the bad cop, it is strategically of the utmost importance to identify them for what they are: partners in capitalist crime.

# Liberalism and Fascism: Partners in Crime

Gabriel Rockhill

“The intellectuals cast a veil over the dictatorial character of bourgeois democracy not least by presenting democracy as the absolute opposite of fascism, not as just another natural phase of it where the bourgeois dictatorship is revealed in a more open form.”

Bertolt Brecht

Time and again we hear that liberalism is the last bulwark against fascism. It represents a defense of the rule of law and democracy in the face of aberrant, malevolent demagogues intent on destroying a perfectly good system for their own gain. This apparent opposition has been deeply engrained in contemporary so-called Western liberal democracies through their shared origin myth. As every school child in the U.S. learns, for instance, liberalism defeated fascism in World War II, beating back the Nazi beast in order to establish a new international order that—for all of its potential faults and misdeeds—was built upon key democratic principles that are antithetical to fascism.

This framing of the relationship between liberalism and fascism not only presents them as complete opposites, but it also defines the very essence of the fight against fascism as the struggle for liberalism. In so doing, it forges an ideological false antagonism. For what fascism and liberalism share is their undying devotion to the capitalist world order. Although one prefers the velvet glove of hegemonic and consensual rule, and the other relies more readily on the iron fist of repressive violence, they are both intent on maintaining and developing capitalist social relations, and they have worked together throughout modern history in order to do so. What this apparent conflict masks—and this is its true ideological power—is that the real, fundamental dividing line is not between two different modes of capitalist governance, but between capitalists and anti-capitalists. The long psychological warfare campaign waged under the deceptive banner of ‘totalitarianism’ has done much to further dissimulate this line of demarcation by disingenuously presenting communism as a form of fascism. As [Domenico Losurdo](#) and others have explained with great historical precision and detail, this is pure ideological pap.

Given the ways in which the current public debate on fascism tends to be framed in relationship to purported liberal resistance, there could scarcely be a timelier task than that of scrupulously re-examining the historical record of actually existing liberalism and fascism. As we shall see even in this brief overview, far from being enemies, they have been—sometimes subtle, sometimes forthright—partners in capitalist crime. For the sake of argument and concision, I will here focus primarily on a conjunctural account of the non-controversial cases of Italy and Germany. However, it is worth stating at the outset, as we will see later in this series, that the Nazi racial police state and colonial rampage—which far surpassed Italy’s capabilities—were modeled on the United States.

## Liberal Collaboration in the Rise of European Fascism

It is of the utmost importance that Western European fascism emerged *within* parliamentary democracies rather than conquering them from the outside. The fascists rose to power in Italy at a moment of severe political and economic crisis on the heels of WWI, and then later the Great Depression. This was also a time when the world had just witnessed the first successful anti-capitalist revolution in the U.S.S.R. Mussolini, who had cut his teeth [working for MI5](#) to break up the Italian peace movement during WWI, was later backed by big industrial capitalists and bankers for his anti-worker, pro-capitalist political orientation. His tactic was to work within the parliamentary system, by mobilizing powerful financial supporters to bankroll his expansive propaganda campaign while his black shirts rode roughshod over picket lines and working-class organizations. In October of 1922, magnates in the Confederation of Industry and major bank leaders provided him with the millions necessary for the March on Rome as a spectacular show of force. However, he did not seize power. Instead, as Daniel Guérin explained in his masterful study [Fascism and Big Business](#), Mussolini was summoned by the king on October 29<sup>th</sup> and was, according to parliamentary norms, entrusted with forming a cabinet. The capitalist state turned itself over without a fight, but Mussolini was intent on forming an absolute majority in parliament with the help of the liberals. They supported his new electoral law in July 1923 and then made a joint slate with the fascists for the election on April 6, 1924. The fascists, who had only had 35 seats in parliament, gained 286 seats with the help of the liberals.

The Nazis rose to power in much the same way, by working within the parliamentary system and courting the favor of big industrial magnates and bankers. The latter provided the financial support necessary to grow the Nazi party and eventually secure the electoral victory of September 1930. Hitler would later reminisce, in a speech on October 19, 1935, on what it meant to have the material resources necessary to support 1,000 Nazi orators with their own cars, who could hold some 100,000 public meetings in the course of a year. In the December 1932 election, the Social Democrat leaders, who were far to the left of contemporary liberals but shared their reformist agenda, refused to form an eleventh-hour coalition with the communists against Nazism. “As in many other countries past and present, so in Germany,” [wrote Michael Parenti](#), “the Social Democrats would sooner ally themselves with the reactionary Right than make common cause with the Reds.” Prior to the election, the Communist Party candidate Ernst Thaelmann had argued that a vote for the conservative Field Marshal von Hindenburg amounted to a vote for Hitler and for war. Only weeks after Hindenburg’s election, he invited Hitler to become chancellor.

Fascism in both cases came to power through bourgeois parliamentary democracy, in which big capital bankrolled the candidates who would do its bidding while also creating a populist spectacle—a false revolution—that marshaled or suggested mass appeal. Its conquest of power took place within this legal and constitutional framework, which secured its apparent legitimacy on the home front, as well as within the international

community of bourgeois democracies. Leon Trotsky understood this perfectly and [diagnosed what was going on at the time](#) with remarkable insight:

The results are at hand: bourgeois democracy transforms itself legally, pacifically, into a fascist dictatorship. The secret is simple enough: bourgeois democracy and fascist dictatorship are the instruments of one and the same class, the exploiters. It is absolutely impossible to prevent the replacement of one instrument by the other by appealing to the Constitution, the Supreme Court at Leipzig, new elections, etc. What is necessary is to mobilize the revolutionary forces of the proletariat. Constitutional fetishism brings the best aid to fascism.

Once its power was secure, however, fascism revealed its authoritarian face, transforming itself into what Trotsky referred to as a military-bureaucratic dictatorship of the Bonapartist type. It unflinchingly set about—at a rather different pace in Italy than in Germany—completing the task it had been hired to accomplish by crushing organized labor, eradicating opposition parties, destroying independent publications, putting a halt to elections, scapegoating and eliminating racialized underclasses, privatizing public assets, launching projects of colonial expansion and investing heavily in a war economy beneficial to its industrial supporters. In establishing the direct dictatorship of big capital, it even destroyed some of the more plebeian and populist elements in its own ranks, while crushing many confused liberals under the juggernaut of repressive class warfare.

It was not only within Italy and Germany that bourgeois democracy allowed for the rise of fascism. This was also true internationally. Capitalist states refused to form an antifascist coalition with the U.S.S.R., a country that fourteen of them had invaded and occupied from 1918 to 1920 in a failed attempt to destroy the world's first workers' republic. During the Spanish Civil War, which historians like Eric Hobsbawm have characterized as a miniature version of the great mid-century war between fascism and communism, Western liberal democracies did not officially support the left-leaning government that had been elected. Instead, they stood idly by while the Axis powers provided massive support to General Francisco Franco as he oversaw a military coup d'état. It is highly revealing that Franco, a [self-declared fascist](#) who is often sidelined in discussions of European fascism, [understood with remarkable clarity](#) why the epiphenomenal characteristics of fascism would differ considerably based on the precise conjuncture: "Fascism, since that is the word that is used, fascism presents, wherever it manifests itself, characteristics which are varied to the extent that countries and national temperaments vary." It was the U.S.S.R. that came to the aid of the Republicans battling fascism in Spain, sending both soldiers and materials. Franco would later return the favor, so to speak, by deploying a volunteer military force to fight godless communism alongside the Nazis. Franco would also, of course, become one of the great postwar allies of the United States in its fight against the Red Menace.

In 1934, the United Kingdom, France and Italy signed the Munich Agreement, in which they agreed to allow Hitler to invade and colonize the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia. "The sheer reluctance of Western governments to enter into effective negotiations with the Red state," [wrote Eric Hobsbawm](#), "even in 1938-39 when the urgency of an anti-

Hitler alliance was no longer denied by anyone, is only too patent. Indeed, it was the fear of being left to confront Hitler alone which eventually drove Stalin, since 1934 the unswerving champion of an alliance with the West against him, into the Stalin-Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939, by which he hoped to keep the U.S.S.R. out of the war.” This non-aggression pact was then disingenuously presented in the Western media as an undeniable indication that the Nazis and communists were somehow allies.

## **International Capitalism and Fascism**

It was not only large industrialists and bankers, as well as landowners, within Italy and Germany that supported and profited from the fascist rise to power. This was equally true of many of the major corporations and banks whose headquarters were in Western bourgeois democracies. Henry Ford was perhaps the most notorious example since in 1938 he was awarded the Grand Cross of the Supreme Order of the German Eagle, which was the highest honor that could be bestowed upon any non-German (Mussolini had received one earlier the same year). Ford had not only funneled ample funding into the Nazi Party, he had provided it with much of its anti-Semitic and anti-Bolshevik ideology. Ford’s conviction that “Communism was a completely Jewish creation,” to [quote James and Suzanne Pool](#), was shared by Hitler, and some have suggested that the latter was so close ideologically to Ford that certain passages from *Mein Kampf* were directly copied from Ford’s anti-Semitic publication *The International Jew*.

Ford was only one of the American companies invested in Germany, and many other U.S. banks, firms and investors profited handsomely from Aryanizations (the expulsion of Jews from business life and the forced transfer of their property into ‘Aryan’ hands), as well as from the German rearmament program. According to Christopher Simpson’s [masterful study](#), “a half-dozen key U.S. companies—International Harvester, Ford, General Motors, Standard Oil of New Jersey, and du Pont—had become deeply involved in German weapons production.” In fact, American investment in Germany sharply increased after Hitler came to power. “Commerce Department reports show,” [writes Simpson](#), “that U.S. investment in Germany increased some 48.5 percent between 1929 and 1940, while declining sharply everywhere else in continental Europe.” The German subsidiaries of U.S. companies like Ford and General Motors, as well as several oil companies, made wide use of forced labor in concentration camps. Buchenwald, for instance, provided concentration camp labor for GM’s enormous Russelsheim plant, as well as for the Ford truck plant located in Cologne, and Ford’s German managers made extensive use of Russian POW’s for war production work (a war crime according to the Geneva Conventions).

John Foster Dulles and Allen Dulles, who would later respectively become the Secretary of State and the head of the CIA, ran Sullivan & Cromwell, which some consider to have been the largest Wall Street law firm at the time. They played a very important role in overseeing, advising and managing global investment in Germany, which had become one of the most important international markets—particularly for American investors—during the second half of the 1920s. Sullivan & Cromwell worked with nearly all of the

major U.S. banks, and they oversaw investments in Germany in excess of a billion dollars. They also worked with dozens of companies and governments all over the world, but John Foster Dulles, [according to Simpson](#), “clearly emphasized projects for Germany, for the military junta in Poland, and for Mussolini’s fascist state in Italy.” In the postwar era, Allen Dulles worked tirelessly to protect his business partners, and he was remarkably successful in securing their assets and helping them avoid prosecution.

Whereas most liberal accounts of fascism focus on its political theater and epiphenomenal eccentricities, thereby avoiding a systemic and radical analysis, it is essential to recognize that if liberalism allowed for the growth of European fascism, it is capitalism that drove this growth.

### **Who Defeated Fascism?**

It is not surprising that the bourgeois democracies of the West were extremely slow to open the Western front, allowing their erstwhile enemy, the U.S.S.R., to be bled by the pro-capitalist Nazi war machine (which [received ample funding from White Russians](#)). In fact, the day after Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union, [Harry Truman flatly declared](#): “If we see that Germany is winning, we ought to help Russia, and if Russia is winning, we ought to help Germany, and that way let them kill as many as possible, although I don’t want to see Hitler victorious in any circumstances.” After the U.S. entered the war, powerful officials like Allen Dulles worked behind the scenes to try and broker a peace deal with Germany that would allow the Nazis to focus all of their attention on eradicating the U.S.S.R.

The widespread idea, at least within the U.S., that fascism was ultimately defeated by liberalism in WWII, due primarily to the U.S. intervention in the war, is a baseless canard. As [Peter Kuznick, Max Blumenthal and Ben Norton reminded listeners in a recent discussion](#), 80% of the Nazis who died in the war were killed on the Eastern Front with the U.S.S.R., where Germany had deployed 200 divisions (versus only 10 in the West). 27 million Soviets gave their lives fighting fascism, whereas 400,000 American soldiers died in the war (which amounts to approximately 1.5% of the Soviet death toll). It was, above all, the Red Army that defeated fascism in WWII, and it is communism—not liberalism—that constitutes the last bulwark against fascism. The historical lesson should be clear: one cannot be truly antifascist without being anti-capitalist.

### **The Ideology of False Antagonisms**

The ideological construction of false antagonisms, in the case of liberalism and fascism, serves multiple purposes:

- It establishes the primary front of struggle as one between rival positions *within* the capitalist camp.
- It channels people’s energy into fighting over the best methods for managing capitalist rule rather than abolishing it.

- It eradicates the true lines of demarcation of global class struggle.
- It attempts to simply take the communist option off the table (by removing it entirely from the field of struggle, or disingenuously presenting it as a form of ‘totalitarianism’).

Not unlike sporting events, which are very important ideological rituals in the contemporary world, the logic of false antagonisms amps up and overinflates all of the idiosyncratic differences and personal rivalries between two opposing teams to such an extent that the frenzied fans come to forget that they are ultimately playing the same game.

In the reactionary political culture of the U.S., which has attempted to redefine the Left as liberal, it is of the utmost importance to recognize that the primary opposition that has structured, and continues to organize, the modern world is the one between capitalism—which is imposed and maintained through liberal ideology and institutions, as well as fascist repression, depending on the time, place and population in question—and socialism. By replacing this opposition by the one between liberalism and fascism, the ideology of false antagonisms aims at making the fight of the century into a capitalist spectacle rather than a communist revolution.

# The U.S. Did Not Defeat Fascism in WWII—It Internationalized It

Gabriel Rockhill

“The U.S. has established itself as the mortal enemy of *all* people’s government, *all* scientific-socialist mobilization of consciousness everywhere on the globe, all anti-imperialist activity on earth.”

George Jackson

One of the founding myths of the contemporary Western European and American world is that fascism was defeated in WWII by liberal democracies, and particularly by the United States. With the subsequent Nuremberg trials and the patient construction of a liberal world order, a bulwark was erected—in fits and starts, and with the constant threat of regression—against fascism and its evil twin in the East. American culture industries have rehearsed this narrative ad nauseum, brewing it into a saccharine ideological Kool-Aid and piping it into every household, shack and street corner with a TV or smartphone, tirelessly juxtaposing the supreme evil of Nazism to the freedom and prosperity of liberal democracy.

The material record suggests, however, that this narrative is actually based on a false antagonism, and that a paradigm shift is necessary in order to understand the history of actually existing liberalism and fascism. The latter, as we shall see, far from being eradicated at the end of WWII, was actually repurposed, or rather redeployed, to serve its primary historical function: to destroy godless communism and its threat to the capitalist civilizing mission. Since the colonial projects of Hitler and Mussolini had become so brazen and erratic, as they shifted from playing more or less by the liberal rules of the game to openly breaking them and then running amok, it was understood that the best way to construct the fascist international was to do so under liberal cover, meaning through clandestine operations that maintained a liberal façade. While this probably sounds like hyperbole to those whose understanding of history has been formatted by bourgeois social science, which focuses almost exclusively on visible government and the aforementioned liberal cover, the history of the invisible government of the national security apparatus suggests that fascism, far from being defeated in WWII, was successfully internationalized.

## The Architects of the Fascist International

When the United States entered WWII, the future head of the CIA, Allen Dulles, bemoaned that his country was fighting the wrong enemy. The Nazis, as he explained, were pro-capitalist Aryan Christians, whereas the true enemy was godless communism and its resolute anti-capitalism. After all, the U.S. had, only some 20 years prior, been part of a massive military intervention in the U.S.S.R., when fourteen capitalist countries sought—in [the words of Winston Churchill](#)—to “strangle the Bolshevik baby in its crib.” Dulles understood, like many of his colleagues in the U.S. government, that what would

later become known as the Cold War was actually the old war, [as Michael Parenti has convincingly argued](#): the one they had been fighting against communism since its inception.

Towards the end of WWII, General Karl Wolff, formerly Himmler's right-hand man, went to see Allen Dulles in Zurich, where he was working for the Office of Strategic Services, the predecessor organization to the CIA. Wolff knew that the war was lost, and he wanted to avoid being brought to justice. Dulles, for his part, wanted the Nazis in Italy under Wolff's command to lay down their arms against the allies and help the Americans in their fight against communism. Wolff, who was the highest-ranking SS officer to survive the war, offered Dulles the promise of developing, with his Nazi team, an intelligence network against Stalin. It was agreed that the general who had played a central role in overseeing the Nazi's genocidal machine, and who [expressed](#) his "special joy" when he secured freight trains to send 5,000 Jews a day to Treblinka, would be protected by the future director of the CIA, who helped him avoid the Nuremberg trials.

Wolff was very far from being the only senior Nazi official protected and rehabilitated by the OSS-CIA. The case of Reinhard Gehlen is particularly telling. This general in the Third Reich had been in charge of *Fremde Heere Ost*, the Nazi intelligence service directed against the Soviets. After the war, he was recruited by the OSS-CIA and met with all of the major architects of the postwar National Security State: Allen Dulles, William Donovan, Frank Wisner, President Truman. He was then appointed to head the first German intelligence service after the war, and he proceeded to employ many of his Nazi collaborators. The Gehlen Organization, as it was known, would become the nucleus of the German intelligence service. It is unclear how many war criminals this decorated Nazi hired, but [Eric Lichtblau estimates](#) that some four thousand Nazi agents were integrated into the network overseen by the American spy agency. With an annual funding of half a million dollars from the CIA in the early years after the war, Gehlen and his strong men were able to act with impunity. [Yvonnick Denoël explained](#) this turnaround with remarkable clarity: "It is hard to understand that, as early as 1945, the army and the US intelligence services recruited without qualms former Nazi criminals. The equation was, however, very simple at the time: the United States had just defeated the Nazis with the help of the Soviets. They henceforth planned to defeat the Soviets with the help of former Nazis."

The situation was similar in Italy because Dulles' agreement with Wolff was part of a larger undertaking, called Operation Sunrise, which mobilized Nazis and fascists to end the Second World War in Italy (and begin the Third World War across the globe). Dulles worked hand in hand with the Agency's future chief counterintelligence officer, James Angleton, who was then stationed by the OSS in Italy. These two men, who would become two of the most powerful political actors of the twentieth century, showed what they were capable of in this close collaboration between the American intelligence services, the Nazis and the fascists. Angleton, on his end, recruited fascists to end the war in Italy so as to minimize the power of the communists. Valerio Borghese was one of his key contacts because this hardline fascist in Mussolini's regime was ready to serve the Americans in the anti-communist struggle, and he became one of the international

figureheads for postwar fascism. Angleton had directly saved him from the hands of the communists, and the man known as the Black Prince was given the opportunity to continue the war against the radical Left under a new boss: the CIA.

Once the war was over, Senior U.S. intelligence officials, including Dulles, Wisner and Carmel Offie, “worked to ensure that denazification only had a limited scope,” [according to Frédéric Charpier](#): “Generals, senior officials, policemen, industrialists, lawyers, economists, diplomats, scholars and real war criminals were spared and put back in their positions.” The man in charge of the Marshall Plan in Germany, for instance, was a former adviser to Hermann Göring, the commander-in-chief of the *Luftwaffe* (air force). Dulles drafted a list of high functionaries of the Nazi state to be protected and passed off as opponents to Hitler. The OSS-CIA proceeded to rebuild the administrative states in Germany and Italy with their anti-communist allies.

[Eric Lichtblau estimates](#) that more than 10,000 Nazis were able to immigrate to the United States in the post-war period (at least 700 official members of the Nazi party had been allowed into the U.S. in the 1930s, while [Jewish refugees were being turned away](#)). In addition to a few hundred German spies and thousands of SS personnel, [Operation Paperclip](#), which began in May 1945, brought at least 1,600 Nazi scientists to the U.S. with their families. This undertaking was aimed at recovering the great minds of the Nazi war machine and putting their research on rockets, aviation, biological and chemical weapons, and so forth, in the service of the American empire. The Joint Intelligence Objectives Agency was set up specifically to recruit Nazis and find them positions in research centers, the government, the army, the intelligence services or universities (at least 14 universities participated, including Cornell, Yale and MIT).

Although the program officially excluded ardent Nazis, at least at the beginning, in actual fact it allowed for the immigration of chemists from IG Farben (which had supplied the deadly gases used in mass exterminations), scientists who had used slaves in concentration camps to make weapons, and doctors who had participated in hideous experiments on Jews, Roma, communists, homosexuals and other prisoners of war. These scientists, who were described by an official in the State Department opposed to Paperclip as “Hitler’s angels of death,” were received with open arms in the land of the free. They were given comfortable accommodations, a laboratory with assistants and the promise of citizenship if their work bore fruit. They went on to conduct research that has been used in the manufacturing of ballistic missiles, sarin gas cluster bombs, and the weaponization of the bubonic plague.

The CIA also collaborated with MI6 to set up secret anti-communist armies in every country in Western Europe. On the pretext of a potential invasion by the Red Army, the idea was to train and equip [networks of illegal stay-behind soldiers](#), who would remain behind enemy lines if the Russians moved westward. They would thus be activated in the newly occupied territory and charged with missions of exfiltration, espionage, sabotage, propaganda, subversion and combat. The two agencies worked with NATO and the intelligence services of many Western European countries to build this vast sub-rosa organization, establish numerous weapons and ammunition caches, and equip their

soldiers of the shadows with everything they needed. To do this, they recruited Nazis, fascists, collaborationists and other anti-communist members of the extreme Right. The numbers vary according to the country, but they are estimated between a few dozen and several hundred, or even a few thousand, per country. According to [a report from the television program \*Retour aux sources\*](#), there were 50 stay-behind network units in Norway, 150 in Germany, more than 600 in Italy and 3,000 in France.

These trained militants would later be mobilized to commit or coordinate terrorist attacks against the civilian population, which were then blamed on the communists in order to justify 'law and order' crackdowns. According to the official numbers in Italy, where this strategy of tension was particularly intense, there were 14,591 politically motivated acts of violence between 1969 and 1987, which killed 491 people and injured 1,181. Vincenzo Vinciguerra, a member of the far-right group Ordine Nuovo and the perpetrator of the bombing near Peteano in 1972, has [explained](#) that the fascist "Avanguardia Nazionale, like Ordine Nuovo, were being mobilized into the battle as part of an anti-Communist strategy originating not with organizations deviant from the institutions of power, but from the state itself, and specifically from within the ambit of the state's relations within the Atlantic Alliance." An Italian parliamentary commission that undertook an investigation of the stay-behind armies in Italy, reached [the following conclusion](#) in 2000: "Those massacres, those bombs, those military actions had been organized or promoted or supported by men inside Italian state institutions and, as has been discovered more recently, by men linked to the structures of United States intelligence."

The U.S. National Security State was also involved in overseeing ratlines that exfiltrated fascists from Europe and allowed them to resettle in safe havens around the world, in exchange for doing its dirty work. The case of Klaus Barbie is but one among thousands, if not tens or hundreds of thousands, but it speaks volumes regarding the internal functioning of this process. Known in France as 'the butcher of Lyon,' he was head of the Gestapo office there for two years, including the time when Himmler gave the order to deport at least 22,000 Jews from France. This specialist in 'enhanced interrogation tactics,' known for torturing to death the coordinator of the French Resistance, Jean Moulin, organized the first roundup of the General Union of Jews in France in February 1943 and the massacre of 41 Jewish refugee children in Izieu in April 1944. Before arriving in Lyon, he had led savage death squads, which had killed more than a million people on the Eastern Front [according to Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair](#). But after the war, the man whom these same authors describe as third on the most-wanted list of SS criminals was working for the Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) of the U.S. Army. He was hired to help build the stay-behind armies by recruiting other Nazis, and to spy on French intelligence services in the French and American controlled regions in Germany.

When France learned what was happening and demanded Barbie's extradition, John McCloy, the U.S. High Commissioner of Germany, refused by claiming that the allegations were based on hearsay. Nevertheless, it ultimately proved too expensive, symbolically, to keep a butcher like Barbie in Europe, so he was sent to Latin America in 1951, where he was able to continue his illustrious career. Settling in Bolivia, he worked

for the security forces of the military dictatorship of General René Barrientos and for the Ministry of the Interior and the counter-insurgency wing of the Bolivian Army under the dictatorship of Hugo Banzer, before actively participating in the Cocaine Coup in 1980 and becoming the director of security forces under General Meza. Throughout his career, he maintained close relationships with his saviors in the U.S. National Security State, playing a central role in Operation Condor, the counter-insurgency project that brought together Latin American dictatorships, with the support of the United States, to violently crush any attempt at egalitarian uprisings from below. He also helped develop the drug empire in Bolivia, including organizing gangs of narco-mercenaries whom he named *Los novios de la muerte*, whose uniforms resembled those of the SS. He traveled freely in the 1960s and 1970s, visiting the U.S. at least seven times, and he most likely played a role in the manhunt organized by the Agency to kill Ernesto “Che” Guevara.

The same basic pattern of integrating fascists into the global war against communism is readily identifiable in Japan, whose system of government prior to and during the war has been described by Herbert P. Bix as “Emperor-system fascism.” Tessa Morris-Suzuki [has convincingly demonstrated](#) the continuity of intelligence services by detailing how the U.S. National Security State oversaw and managed the KATO organization. This private intelligence network, very much like the Gehlen organization, was stocked with former leading members of the military and intelligence services, including the Imperial Army’s Chief of Intelligence (Arisue Seizō), who shared with his American handler (Charles Willoughby) a deep admiration for Mussolini. The U.S. occupation forces also cultivated tight relationships with senior officials in Japan’s wartime civilian intelligence community (most notably Ogata Taketora). This remarkable continuity between prewar and postwar Japan has led Morris-Suzuki and other scholars to map Japanese history in terms of a *transwar regime*, meaning one that continued from before to after the war. This concept also allows us to make sense of what was happening above ground in the realm of the visible government. For the sake of concision, suffice it to cite the remarkable case of the man known as the “Devil of Shōwa” for his brutal rule of Manchukuo (the Japanese colony in Northeast China): Nobusuke Kishi. A great admirer of Nazi Germany, Kishi was appointed Minister of Munitions by Prime Minister Hideki Tojo in 1941, in order to prepare Japan for a total war against the U.S., and he was the one who signed the official declaration of war against America. After serving a brief prison term as a war criminal in the postwar era, he was rehabilitated by the CIA, along with his cell mate, the kingpin of organized crime Yoshio Kodama. Kishi, with the support and generous financial backing of his handlers, took over the Liberal Party, made it into a rightwing club of former leaders of imperial Japan, and rose to become Prime Minister. “The [CIA] money flowed for at least fifteen years, under four American presidents,” [writes Tim Wiener](#), “and it helped consolidate one-party rule in Japan for the rest of the cold war.”

U.S. national security services have also established a global educational network to train pro-capitalist combatants—sometimes under the leadership of experienced Nazis and fascists—in the tried-and-true techniques of repression, torture and destabilization, as well as propaganda and psychological warfare. The [famous School of the Americas](#) was established in 1946 with the explicit goal of training a new generation of anti-communist warriors worldwide. According to some, this school has the distinction of having educated

the greatest number of dictators in world history. Whatever the case may be, it is part of a much larger institutional network. It is worth mentioning, for example, the educational contributions of the Public Safety Program: “For about twenty-five years,” [writes former CIA officer John Stockwell](#), “the CIA, [...] trained and organized police and paramilitary officers from around the world in techniques of population control, repression, and torture. Schools were set up in the United States, Panama, and Asia, from which tens of thousands graduated. In some cases, former Nazi officers from Hitler’s Third Reich were used as instructors.”

## **Fascism Goes Global under Liberal Cover**

The American imperium has thus played a central role in the construction of a fascist international by protecting right-wing militants and enlisting them in the Third World War against ‘communism,’ an elastic label extended to any political orientation opposed to the interests of the capitalist ruling class. This international expansion of fascist modes of governance has led to a proliferation of concentration camps, terrorist and torture campaigns, dirty wars, dictatorial regimes, vigilante groups and organized crime networks around the world. The examples could be enumerated ad nauseum, but I will curtail them in the interests of space and simply invoke the [testimony of Victor Marchetti](#), who was a senior CIA official from 1955 to 1969: “We were supporting every half-assed dictator, military junta, oligarchy that existed in the Third World, as long as they promised to somehow maintain the status quo, which would of course be beneficial to U.S. geopolitical interests, military interests, big business interests, and other special interests.”

The record of U.S. foreign policy since WWII is probably the best measure of its unique contribution to the internationalization of fascism. Under the banner of democracy and freedom, the United States has, [according to William Blum](#):

- Endeavored to overthrow more than 50 foreign governments.
- Grossly interfered in democratic elections in at least 30 countries.
- Attempted to assassinate more than 50 foreign leaders.
- Dropped bombs on the people of more than 30 countries.
- Attempted to suppress a populist or nationalist movement in 20 countries.

The Association for Responsible Dissent, composed of 14 former CIA officers, [calculated](#) that their agency was responsible for killing a minimum of 6 million people in 3,000 major operations and 10,000 minor operations between 1947 and 1987. These are direct murders, so the numbers do not account for premature deaths under the fascist-backed capitalist world system due to mass incarceration, torture, malnutrition, lack of drinkable water, exploitation, oppression, social degradation, ecological illness or curable disease (in 2017, [according to the U.N.](#), 6.3 million children and young adolescents died from avoidable causes linked to the socio-economic and ecological inequalities of the Capitalocene, which amounts to one child dying every 5 seconds).

To establish itself as the global military hegemon and international guard dog of capitalism, the U.S. government and National Security State have relied on the help of the significant number of Nazis and fascists it integrated into its global network of

repression, including the 1,600 Nazis brought into the U.S. through Operation Paperclip, the 4,000 or so integrated into the Gehlen organization, the tens or even hundreds of thousands that were reintegrated into the 'postwar'—or rather transwar—regimes in fascist countries, the large number who were given free passage to Empire's backyard—Latin America—and elsewhere, as well as the thousands or tens of thousands integrated into NATO's secret stay-behind armies. This global network of seasoned anti-communist assassins has also been used to train armies of terrorists around the world to participate in dirty wars, coups d'état, destabilization efforts, sabotage, and terror campaigns.

All of this has been done under the cover of a liberal democracy, and with the assistance of its powerful culture industries. The true legacy of WWII, far from being that of a liberal world order that had defeated fascism, is that of a veritable fascist international developed under liberal cover in order to try and destroy those who had actually fought and won the war against fascism: the communists.

# Liberalism & Fascism: The Good Cop & Bad Cop of Capitalism

Gabriel Rockhill

“There is currently one state [the United States] that has made at least the weak beginnings of a better order.”

Adolph Hitler in 1926

“Give Franco a hood and he would be a member of the Ku Klux Klan.”

Langston Hughes

## The One-State-One-Government Paradigm

It is often presumed that each individual state has a particular form of government—be it liberal, fascist or authoritarian—which constitutes the primary mode of rule throughout the entire country. We thus often hear expressions like ‘the liberal democracies of the West’ or ‘the former dictatorships of Latin America.’ This geography of governments is linked to a political chronology, which tells us that a government can shift from one form to another, hence the prevalence of sayings like ‘the return of democracy’ or the ‘resurgence of fascism.’ The dominant paradigm for understanding the relationship between states and government can thus be summed up in terms of one overarching principle: each state, if it is not in an open civil war, only has one form of government at one point in time, which rules over its entire territory and population.

The one-state-one-government paradigm dissimulates the complex ways in which populations are governed. Its naïve either-or logic provides cover for less savory forms of governance if the state is declared, for instance, a liberal democracy. It also produces a geography and chronology of faraway fascism, by which liberal states seek to convince their citizenry that fascism is something that occurred in the past, that might emerge in the future if liberal institutions aren’t preserved, or that only infests distant lands recalcitrant to democracy. Whatever the case may be, we can rest assured that fascism is not an issue *right here, right now*.

This paradigm serves as a powerful form of perception management insofar as it does not allow us to see how various sectors of the population and different geographic regions are actually governed and by what forces. Instead of commencing, then, with the one-state-one-government presumption, we should begin the other way around, by a bottom-up materialist analysis of the various modes of governance operative in each historical conjuncture. These modes are not limited to what is called the visible government, meaning the political theater that is daily staged for us by media conglomerates working for the ruling elite, but they also include the invisible government of the deep state, as well as all of the forms of governance that are discretely fostered by the state, but which are outsourced to vigilantes and organized crime (which is not to mention all of the tight economic controls that shackle peoples’ lives). Rather than there being a single agent of

governance, such as the elected government, the multiple-modes-of-governance paradigm insists on the multiplicity of agencies that are mobilized for governing different populations, as well as on the variable roles that they play across social strata and at different points in class struggle.

## Amerikkka

Consider the interwar period in the United States, when Mussolini and Hitler were rising to power within the bourgeois democracies of Europe. According to the one-state-one-government paradigm, the U.S. was a liberal democracy at the time, and that is certainly how it presented itself. In fact, it had just won what Woodrow Wilson referred to as a war that made the world 'safe for democracy.' In a statement that is less often cited in American history books, [Wilson clarified](#), however, what the hollow term of 'democracy' actually meant by specifying that the goal of the Great War was "to keep the white race strong" and to preserve "white civilization and its domination of the planet."

Indeed, the U.S. was a racist police state that empowered millions of white-supremacist vigilantes, and that served as a model for the fascist movements in Europe. "By refusing immigrants to enter [...] if they are in a bad state of health," Hitler wrote admiringly of the U.S. [in \*Mein Kampf\*](#), "and by excluding certain races from the right to become naturalized as citizens, they [the Americans] have begun to introduce principles similar to those on which we wish to ground the People's State." As James Whitman [has argued in detail](#), America served as the prototype for the Nazis because it was widely understood to be at the cutting edge of racist and eugenicist statecraft when it came to immigration, second-class citizenship and miscegenation. The Prussian Memorandum of 1933, which outlined the Nazi's legal program, specifically invoked Jim Crow, and the *National Socialist Handbook of Law and Legislation* concluded its chapter on the construction of a race state by acknowledging that America was the country that had fundamentally recognized the truths of racism and taken the first necessary steps toward a racial state that would be fulfilled by Nazi Germany. Moreover, scholars like Domenico Losurdo, Ward Churchill and Norman Rich have all argued that the model for Nazi Germany's white-supremacist colonial expansion was the U.S. American Holocaust against the indigenous population. "The analogue of the 'American West' and the 'Nazi East' became," [according to Carroll P. Kakel](#), "an obsession for Hitler and other Nazi 'true believers.'"

When Italian fascism first strutted onto the world stage, many Americans at the time immediately recognized it as a European version of the Ku Klux Klan. "Comparisons between the homegrown Klan and Italian fascism," [writes Sarah Churchwell](#), "soon became ubiquitous in the American press." With some 5 million members in the mid-1920s, the K.K.K. was a deadly vigilante network that enforced the American racial police state, but it was also only part of a larger repressive apparatus. This included white supremacist groups like the Black Legion that were offshoots of the Klan, self-declared fascist organizations such as the Silver Legion of America, Nazi organizations like the Friends of New Germany and the German American Bund, brutal vigilante groups that policed agricultural workers with what Carey McWilliams [aptly describes](#) as "farm

fascism,” and an expansive network of extremely violent anti-worker organizations that were backed by big business. These anti-labor para-state militants were generally allowed to act with impunity since their agenda seamlessly coalesced with that of the U.S. government. To take but one telling example, in 1919 and 1920, the General Intelligence Division (GID) of the U.S. Justice Department orchestrated raids in more than 30 U.S. cities, arresting between 5 and 10 thousand anti-capitalist activists, often without warrants, evidence or trials. If one was a member of a racialized group, an immigrant, a worker who sought to organize, or an anti-capitalist activist, it went without saying that you did not have the same rights as those purportedly living under a liberal democracy.

In *Facts and Fascism*, George Seldes detailed the striking similarities between global fascist movements and those in the United States by demonstrating how big capital in America directly invested in fascism at home and abroad, controlled a pro-capitalist and often fascist-friendly press, and financed repressive racist and anti-labor organizations. The American Legion, for instance, regularly invited Mussolini to its conventions, and one of its first commanders is [on record](#) as stating: “Do not forget that the Fascisti are to Italy what the American Legion is to the United States.” Its anti-labor activities constitute one of the most violent chapters of American history, according to Seldes. “In 1934,” [he reminds us](#), plans were made for a coup d’état in the U.S. when “leading members of the Legion conspired with Wall Street brokers and other big business men to upset the government of the United States and establish a fascist regime.”

## **Multiple Modes of Governance**

The paradigm of multiple modes of governance allows us to bracket the image that a state projects of itself—its aesthetics of power—so that we can analyze how different populations are actually governed. This tends to vary according to time, place and socioeconomic stratum. Emmett Till, to take a single example, might very well have lived in a state that declared itself to be a liberal democracy, but his brutal beating and murder, as well as the subsequent acquittal of his assassins in a court of law, demonstrate how he and other poor and racialized people were actually governed: by fascist vigilante violence openly condoned by the state. It is important to note that multiple modes of governance are often operative in a single space-time and sometimes target the same populations. The liberal charade of justice during Till’s murder trial obviously sought to convince at least some people that their primary mode of governance was that of the rule of law.

What a materialist analysis demonstrates is that liberalism and fascism, contrary to what the dominant ideology maintains, are not opposites. They are partners in capitalist crime. For the sake of argument, it is worth clarifying that I am not here distinguishing between fascism and authoritarianism, although this distinction can sometimes prove helpful (as in Andre Gunder Frank’s [insightful analysis](#) of Latin American military dictatorships). Whereas fascism is generally understood to be a movement that mobilizes sectors of civil society through propaganda campaigns, financial backing and state empowerment, authoritarianism is often defined as relying primarily on the police and military to control

the population. These are somewhat porous categories, however, since fascism's vigilantes are sometimes simply off duty employees of the repressive state apparatus, and authoritarianism has often deputized vigilantes and integrated them into the state. Moreover, in the cases of Italy and Germany, it is arguable that fascism actually evolved into a form of authoritarianism. During their ascent to power within bourgeois democracies, fascists in both cases ran enormous propaganda campaigns to mobilize civil society and work through the electoral system, but once in power, they destroyed the more plebian elements in their fascist bands, and they integrated what was left of them into the state apparatus.

Historically, liberalism and fascism, in this broad sense, have functioned as two modes of capitalist governance that operate in conjunction with one another, following the logic of the police interrogation tactic known as good cop / bad cop. Liberalism, as the good cop, promises freedom, the rule of law and the protection of a benefactor state in exchange for acquiescence to capitalist socioeconomic relations and pseudo-democracy. It tends to both serve and attract members of the middle and upper-middle classes, as well as those who aspire to be part of them. The bad cop of fascism has proven particularly useful for governing those populations that are poor, racialized, and discontent, as well as for intervening in various parts of the world to impose capitalist social relations by force. If people are not hoodwinked by the false promises of the good cop, or they are not motivated by other reasons to be acquiescent, then the liberals' partner in crime is on call to beat them into compliance. Those who rise up from any class in order to contest capitalism should be ready to have the liberals and their supposed regime of rights tap out, ceding the fight to their more vicious ally while looking the other way, and reminding any onlookers of the important differences between the lesser of two evils.

The hasty identification of fascism with government, and the complementary opposition between fascist and liberal governments, masks these multiple forms of governance, just as the definition of a nation-state as 'democratic' independently of its foreign policy or internal class wars blinds us to its variegated forms of population control. Moreover, it imposes the liberal veil of ignorance, which maintains that fascism is only an important phenomenon if it completely takes over the government. The subtext, of course, is that it is absolutely fine if it continues, as it does in the U.S., as a form of population management for oppressed and exploited groups through concentration camps and ICE raids, police and vigilante murders, brutal assaults on water protectors, military interventions abroad, and other such activities. As long as a modicum of liberal decorum is maintained for even a small sector of the population, we can rest assured that what we need to do first and foremost is fight to protect the system of liberal rule from so-called fascism.

This is not to deny in the least that there is often, for certain sectors of the population, a profound, world altering difference between a self-declared fascist government and fascist modes of governance under liberal cover. When fascist parties attain state power and are no longer held back by their *commedia dell'arte* with liberals, they can and have unleashed brutal forms of repression on sectors of the population that are generally protected, while increasing their attack on those that are not and launching barbarous colonial wars. Moreover, dealing with the casuistry and discursive contradictions of the

good cop is usually far preferable to facing the iron fist of the bad cop when building power through political parties and organizations. However, none of this should blind us to the fact that fascist modes of governance are a very real and present part of the so-called liberal world order, which need to be identified as such in order to be directly contested.

### **Liberal Tolerance and the Policing of Capital**

If liberals are tolerant of fascism and defend the rights of fascists, it is not because they are higher moral beings. It is because—whether they know it or not—their system of pro-capitalist governance necessitates keeping guard dogs on call for the dirty work. While it is true that they sometimes prefer the general population to be compliant and fall in line with the rigged elections of 60-second dollar democracy, they need to maintain the ability to smash anti-capitalism if there is ever any real threat to the system that supports them.

The good cop / bad cop routine only succeeds if it is able to drive a wedge between the two and create the illusion that there is a fundamental difference between the amiable police officer who understands our plight and the brutal sidekick who is deaf to our pleas. If the violence of the bad cop is morally reprehensible to the good cop, however, it is because it serves as the latter's bogeyman, meaning the greater of two evils that the good cop uses to subject populations to its unique form of evil (compliance with capitalist social relations). It is imperative, then, to recognize, that the good cop and the bad cop ultimately want the same thing: subjects who, by hook or by crook, accept the pervasive violence, ecological destruction and profound inequality inherent in capitalism. Using different tactics, whose very purpose is to obscure their shared strategy, they are both policing the capitalist system. As the American radical tradition has repeatedly pointed out, in language sure to sound barbarous to refined liberal ears: a pig is always just a pig.

Far from being exceptional or intermittent, fascism is thus an integral part of the systems of governance within which we live, or at least most people live. It is not a tragedy that might arrive in the future (although there can, of course, be moments of intensification or complete seizures of state power). It is a mode of governance that is already operative here and now within the system of bourgeois democracy. Instead of waiting for the signs that we are truly within fascism, we need to learn to see through the forms of perception management that create a false antagonism and thereby dupe us into accepting the status quo. As history has proven time and again, the real fight against fascism can never be undertaken by lining up with the good cop.