

Americanism Personified: Why Fascism Has Always Been an Inevitable Outcome of the American Project

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When fascism comes to America it will be wrapped in the flag and carrying a cross." This quote, which has often been misattributed to Sinclair Lewis, is wise in its recognizing the authoritarian potential of both nationalism and organized religion. In slight contrast, Professor Halford E. Luccock of the Divinity School of Yale University said in a 1938 interview, "When and if fascism comes to America it will not be labeled 'made in Germany'; it will not be marked with a swastika; it will not even be called fascism; it will be called, of course, 'Americanism.'" Luccock's view was that of a Christian theologian during the height of Nazi Germany, likely meant to not only downplay the role of religion but perhaps more so warning against the false idolatry of nationalistic reverence.

Despite the tidbits of insight offered, both quotes underestimate Americanism as a highly-authoritative and dominating national project in and of itself. At the time of both quotes, America had already cemented strong elements conducive to fascism: an economy based in capitalist modes of production, a geography created through mass extermination of Native American populations, white supremacist ideals rooted in both dominant culture and pseudoscience, and aggressive expansionist and imperialist projects throughout the Western hemisphere. It should come as no surprise that Adolf Hitler studied, admired, and was inspired by the US genocide of Native Americans as well as its subsequent reservation program. "Hitler's concept of concentration camps as well as the practicality of genocide owed much, so he claimed, to his studies of English and United States history," John Toland wrote in his book, *Adolf Hitler: The Definitive Biography*. "He admired the camps for Boer prisoners in South Africa and for the Indians in the wild west; and often praised to his inner circle the efficiency of America's extermination-by starvation and uneven combat-of the red savages who could not be tamed by captivity."

This notion of American fascism is certainly nothing new. As Steve Martinot explains in his invaluable essay on "Fascism in the US," this discussion has been around for a long time:

"In an early, now canonical discussion of racism in the US, Pierre Van den Berghe (1967) pointed out that a prevalent racial despotism coexisted with constitutionality, a confluence he characterized as 'herrenvolk democracy' - 'democracy for white people.' In his book, *Friendly Fascism*, (1980) Bertram Gross argues that the US under Reagan began moving toward a form of governance closely analogous to 1930s European fascism; he compares the social consequences of corporate influence to Mussolini's 'corporate state.' George Jackson finds no better word than 'fascism' to describe the psychotic use of power and violence by which white prisoners relate to black, or by which the prison administration maintains its hierarchical system - and which he sees mirrored in white-black relations outside the prison."

As a settler-colonial project steeped in white supremacist domination and capitalist ideals, America is and always has been an ideal fascist breeding ground. The current rise of Donald Trump, the "alt-right," neo-Nazism, and white nationalism is nothing new, it is merely Americanism becoming further personified through the vulnerabilities opened by the failures of capitalism and the weakening of liberal democracy - systems that were constructed on shoddy, hypocritical foundations to begin with.

Fascism as a Capitalist Phenomenon

"People that are more concerned with the trappings of this pseudo mass society and its spectacular leisure sports; parades where strangers meet, shout each other

down and often trample each other on the way home will never see the ugly reality of fascism. Amerikkkan fascism is so effective in emotionally appealing to people's desires and fears that when we point out to them that Amerikkkan capitalism has had 200 years to disguise and refine its face, and 50 years to consolidate fascist control of the country, they would simply dismiss us."

- Shaka Sankofa Zulu

Fascism, as a conscious and working ideology, was intentionally constructed to serve as a polar opposite to the materialist conception of thinking that scientific socialism (Marxism) was based in. Benito Mussolini, a former socialist, specifically noted this in his Doctrine of Fascism, which he wrote with Giovanni Gentile. Fascism is a collectivist ideology, much like socialism; however, fascism calls on a societal tie that differs greatly from that of socialism. While socialist collectivism is rooted in an inclusive, communal responsibility to have basic material needs met for all, fascist collectivism is rooted in an exclusive, nationalistic responsibility to dominate and conquer peoples who are viewed as not belonging.

While socialist collectivism is based in worker-control of the means of production, fascist collectivism is based in a natural adherence to corporatism, which takes form in concentrated control of the means of production (mimicking that of capitalism). While socialism seeks to undermine and ultimately destroy the capitalist system, fascism seeks to fortify the late stages of capitalist accumulation by merging corporate power with the State. As socialists view the working-class struggle as the primary vehicle to creating self-determination, fascists flatly reject economic (material) motives as a potential driving force for societal change.

The authoritarian nature of capitalism is an ideal precursor to fascism. Because of this, fascism seeks to take the reins of the system and use it to carry out its nationalistic project that is based in a form of heritage or national identity as determined by the fascists. The Doctrine of Fascism explains,

"Fascism [is] the complete opposite of...Marxian Socialism, [which posits] the materialist conception of history of human civilization can be explained simply through the conflict of interests among the various social groups and by the change and development in the means and instruments of production. Fascism, now and always, believes in holiness and in heroism; that is to say, in actions influenced by no economic motive, direct or indirect. And if the economic conception of history be denied, according to which theory men are no more than puppets, carried to and fro by the waves of chance, while the real directing forces are quite out of their control, it follows that the existence of an unchangeable and unchanging class-war is also denied - the natural progeny of the economic conception of history. And above all Fascism denies that class-war can be the preponderant force in the transformation of society."

The authoritarian nature of capitalism is rooted in its most elemental relationship - that between the owners and the workers - which naturally creates minority class dominance over the majority class. Fascism seeks to transform this class dominance into national dominance. Because of this, parasitic billionaire exploiters of the capitalist class (like Donald Trump) become welcome members of this nationalist project, and exploited workers who embrace fascism are more than willing to overlook the complicity of the creators of their own misery as long as these overseers are willing to repent through an embrace and renewal of ethnic nationalism.

The natural extension from capitalism to fascism is impossible to ignore. In structural terms, as concentrations of wealth and power are created through the mechanisms of capitalism, so too

are widespread dispossession for the masses of people who exist under the system. Despite the construction of robust welfare and police states, which have been implemented to prevent this widespread dispossession from transforming into civil unrest, the weight of such unequal power dynamics is bound to crush the experiment we've come to know as "liberal capitalist democracy." This has never been more evident than in the neoliberal era, where both globalization and so-called "free-market" ideology have unleashed the system to do what it is designed to do.

An anarcho-capitalist (American "libertarian") analysis of fascism, presented by Sheldon Richman in the *Library of Economics and Liberty*, recognizes at least a part of the natural connection between capitalism and fascism, without overtly saying so:

"Where socialism nationalized property explicitly, fascism did so implicitly, by requiring owners to use their property in the 'national interest'-that is, as the autocratic authority conceived it. (Nevertheless, a few industries were operated by the state.) Where socialism abolished all market relations outright, fascism left the appearance of market relations while planning all economic activities. Where socialism abolished money and prices, fascism controlled the monetary system and set all prices and wages politically. In doing all this, fascism denatured the marketplace. Entrepreneurship was abolished. State ministries, rather than consumers, determined what was produced and under what conditions."

While Richman would surely argue that such elements - autocratic control, currency manipulation, and the end of entrepreneurship - are not natural byproducts of capitalism, they perfectly describe the stage of monopoly capitalism (actual existing capitalism) that has inevitably developed as a result of the most basic mechanisms of the system: the labor-capital relationship and the private ownership of land as a means to exploit. In other words, what American "libertarians" like Richman describe as "corporatism" or "crony capitalism" is really just a mature and naturally developed stage of capitalism. The "cronies" are merely the benefactors of this inherent process. This point has been illustrated by many economists outside of the establishment, and perhaps most effectively and intensely by the *Monthly Review* school.

The insurmountable weight that capitalism has brought down on "democracy" has demanded the need for more authoritarian adjustments within government, as societal unrest becomes more likely. This mature stage of capitalism creates a ripe environment for fascism, both in its creation of a highly-centralized State apparatus that has already meshed with corporate power, as well as in its need to recruit masses of foot soldiers from within the systematically dispossessed population. The Fascist Doctrine describes the transfer of the "Liberal State" to the "Fascist State":

"The foundation of Fascism is the conception of the State, its character, its duty, and its aim. Fascism conceives of the State as an absolute, in comparison with which all individuals or groups are relative, only to be conceived of in their relation to the State. The conception of the Liberal State is not that of a directing force, guiding the play and development, both material and spiritual, of a collective body, but merely a force limited to the function of recording results: on the other hand, the Fascist State is itself conscious and has itself a will and a personality - thus it may be called the "ethic" State."

The transformation that Mussolini and Gentile describe is that of a capitalist state with pluralistic tendencies that are conducive to capitalist growth to one of a corporatist state with homogenous tendencies that are designed to protect and grow nationalist interests. While modern fascists in the United States tend to focus on "multiculturalism" and what they refer to as "cultural Marxism," they fail to realize that the same structure which shaped these social dynamics happens to be a prerequisite for the fascist transition. The Western capitalist system required

a massive, intercontinental slave trade to get started, centuries of internationalist/globalist expansion to spur continuous growth, and an imperialist agenda that has displaced entire societies throughout the global South. In other words, the tactics that have been used to feed the capitalist system, most of which could be characterized as crimes against humanity, not only created the incredibly unequal distributions of wealth and power both nationally and internationally, but also created the societal makeup that fascist foot soldiers decry. In this sense, capitalism has not dug its own grave, like Marx once promised that it would; it actually has birthed the inevitability of fascism.

From "Liberal State" to "Fascist State"

Through capitalism's reliance on imperialism, the transition from Liberal State to Fascist State has already begun. In order to be formally transitioned into fascist control, it merely needs time, political direction, and a forceful wresting of power from the entrenched Liberal State. Once completed, the nature of imperialism shifts from one of economic motivations to one of nationalistic motivations. The doctrine discusses this process:

"For Fascism, the growth of empire, that is to say the expansion of the nation, is an essential manifestation of vitality, and its opposite a sign of decadence. Peoples which are rising, or rising again after a period of decadence, are always imperialist; and renunciation is a sign of decay and of death. Fascism is the doctrine best adapted to represent the tendencies and the aspirations of a people, like the people of Italy, who are rising again after many centuries of abasement and foreign servitude. But empire demands discipline, the coordination of all forces and a deeply felt sense of duty and sacrifice: this fact explains many aspects of the practical working of the regime, the character of many forces in the State, and the necessarily severe measures which must be taken against those who would oppose this spontaneous and inevitable movement of Italy in the twentieth century, and would oppose it by recalling the outworn ideology of the nineteenth century - repudiated wheresoever there has been the courage to undertake great experiments of social and political transformation; for never before has the nation stood more in need of authority, of direction and order. If every age has its own characteristic doctrine, there are a thousand signs which point to Fascism as the characteristic doctrine of our time. For if a doctrine must be a living thing, this is proved by the fact that Fascism has created a living faith; and that this faith is very powerful in the minds of men is demonstrated by those who have suffered and died for it."

While gaining control of the State is formally accomplished through the emergence of electoral movements, it still requires a groundswell of support from the lower classes. The class divisions created by capitalism, especially within post-industrialized societies like that of the US, present the most opportune dynamics for what is sometimes referred to as "right-wing populism." Not only is the emergence of an industrialized middle class a key component in this development, but even more crucial is the subsequent collapse of this middle class. This second stage has been occurring in the US since the 1980s, with the onset of neoliberalism and globalization. Politically speaking, it has manifested itself in Reagan's neoliberal blueprint, the neoliberalization of the Democratic Party, the complete economic abandonment of the American working class by both major parties, the rise of proto-fascist groups like the Tea Party, the triumph of lesser-evilism, and

now in the rise of 21st-century neo-Nazism and white nationalism, both of which have helped buoy an actual billionaire capitalist to the White House.

Gaining political support from the working class seems like a difficult proposition for those running for office, since the political parties in power are the same parties which have abandoned most Americans for the past several decades. However, this is where fascism's reliance on emotion and identity, or what Mussolini refers to as "duty," "holiness," and "heroism," over material need becomes so powerful. The structural dispossession of masses of people by macro-systems like capitalism is difficult to pinpoint, especially when systemic understanding is absent. Left-wing populism relies on these understandings, as well as the expectation that material conditions will motivate the working class to act in its own best interests, which are diametrically opposed to the interests of capital, bourgeois politicians from within the liberal democratic system, and of course billionaire businessmen. Fascism makes things easier, focuses on a national/racial identity, and deems all who exist outside of that identity to be enemies of the State.

The structural pressure created capitalism, especially against that of the former middle class, or against anyone feeling as though they're losing privilege, creates an environment conducive for recruitment. This process was never explained more succinctly than by George Jackson:

"The shock troops of fascism on the mass political level are drawn from members of the lower-middle class who feel the upward thrust of the lower classes more acutely. These classes feel that any dislocation of the present economy resulting from the upward thrust of the masses would affect their status first. They are joined by that sector of the working class which is backward enough to be affected by nationalistic trappings and loyalty syndrome that sociologists have termed the 'Authoritarian Personality.' One primary aim of the fascist arrangement is to extend and develop this new pig class, to degenerate and diffuse working-class consciousness with a psycho-social appeal to man's herd instincts. Development and exploitation of the authoritarian syndrome is at the center of 'totalitarian' capitalism (fascism). It feeds on a small but false sense of class consciousness and the need for community."

The authoritarian nature of fascism is found in its reliance on identity, a fluid concept that allows for some maneuverability within the minds of its adherents, while also shoring up the herd mentality that becomes rooted in its perceived national agenda. In other words, the individual within a fascist movement may perceive themselves, the movement, and even the ultimate goal of the movement in varying ways; however, when called upon to act, their actions will always fall in line with the national agenda as set by its directors. This is why fascism requires the presence of strong leaders. Much like the Orc armies in JRR Tolkien's famous *Hobbit* series, the foot soldiers of fascism are easily swayed into violent action for a greater good that is constructed by a strong, charismatic leader. And with this support, those leaders can accomplish electoral feats previously unheard of.

Punching Down: The Fascist Engine of White Supremacy and Xenophobia

Despite the structural failures of both capitalism and "liberal capitalist democracy," American fascism would find difficulties materializing without a strong element of identity. Whereas left-wing populism clearly relies on the material desperation of the working class under capitalism,

fascism's reliance on the vague concepts of "holiness" and "heroism" needs a constructed and recognizable identity.

In America, the structural and cultural phenomenon of white supremacy serves as this identity, and therefore acts as the engine needed to redirect the widespread angst developed through the systematic dispossession created by capitalism and "democracy" into a nationalistic movement. It is important to understand that white supremacy is not something only reserved for jackbooted neo-Nazis giving "Heil Hitler!" salutes, but that it is a systemic phenomenon which is heavily seeped in American culture. It is both a conditioned mentality and a material reality.

The conditioned mentality that Black lives are substandard has been shaped through centuries of popular culture, from the racist Minstrel shows of the early 19th century, which utilized the "coon caricature" to lampoon Black people as dim-witted, lazy, and buffoonish, to modern TV shows like COPS, which perpetuates the racist stereotype that Black people are more prone to debauchery and criminality. The material reality has been shaped by two and a half centuries of chattel slavery followed by various forms of legalized systems of servitude and second-class citizenship, including sharecropping, convict leasing, Jim Crow, and mass incarceration. This history has built complex layers of institutional racism carried out under the guise of legality, and a systematic ghettoization supported by both "white flight" and widespread discriminatory housing and employment practices, all of which have combined to shape a uniquely intense experience for Black Americans who must face both class and racial oppression.

The two factors (conditioned mentality and material reality) interplay with one another in a way that is increasingly disastrous for the ways in which American society views and treats its Black citizens. Because of the perpetuation of racial stereotypes, people on average are less empathetic toward their Black counterparts. Studies have shown that white children as young as seven years old believe that Black children feel less pain than them; that emergency medical personnel are less likely to give pain medication to Black and Latinx children who are in pain; and that "Caucasian observers reacted to pain suffered by African people significantly less than to pain of Caucasian people."

The material reality shaped by institutional racism has created a landscape where Black people are disproportionately poor, unemployed, and in prison. Martinot talks about this seemingly never-ending cycle that is centered within a highly racialized criminal punishment system:

"The social effects of this process are catastrophic, yet familiar. Not only does felonization of a population insure massive unemployment (a general tendency not to hire people with a record), but routine felony charges amount to systematic disenfranchisement (14% of black people by 1998, according to Fellner and Mauer). Recent studies indicate that one out of every three black men under the age of 30 has been through the judicial system in the last 25 years. To continually remove a sizable number of people from a community in this way constitutes a massive disruption of its social coherence. This disruption buttresses its criminalization as a community in white society's eyes, and rationalizes the disinvestment of capital and a general financial obstruction of community asset accumulation. Racial oppression, impoverishment, imprisonment and police impunity are all of a piece. Ultimately, the increase in prison population has become one of the arguments, in social discourse, for further drug laws and racial profiling. It is a self-generating cycle. What is significant about it is that it is not perceived by white society at large as an extant injustice. Instead, more prisons are called for and accepted, again with a sense form of cultural familiarity ("how else are we going to deal with crime?"). This acceptance euphemizes itself in political campaigns as being "hard on crime" as opposed to addressing the social conditions that

generate crime. It inhabits a white consensus in solidarity with the police and prison industry that have allowed for their untrammled growth – a consensus whose content is white racialized identity.”

When turned on its head, white supremacists can use this current reality to support their arguments that Black people are in these positions because of ”poor decisions,” ”a lack of personal responsibility,” ”a lack of work ethic,” ”laziness,” or even some type of biological shortcoming, as is argued by so-called ”race realists” (the modern term for pseudoscientific racism).

Individualizing systemic problems is both a convenient way to blame victims of societal oppression, by basically ignoring history, and the result of a general lack of historical and practical knowledge regarding how systems shape lived realities for people within those systems. The latter point helps explain why ignorance is naturally drawn to reactionary politics, and why fascism has always been the likely outcome for America. As most Americans suffer from extreme deficits in sociological, historical, economic, and systemic understanding, any reaction against personal misgivings (which are experienced by the working class as a whole under capitalism) will surely default into raw emotion for many. This is fascism’s advantage, as it feeds off aimless frustrations. Ignorance is easily swayed; and guiding these frustrations into an intense anger against women, immigrants, Muslims, Black people, Brown people, or LGBTQ people, is easily accomplished.

Ignorance is also a harbinger to cowardice. Due to a lack of general understanding of the world around them, such people grow to see the world as a dangerous place. So they must back themselves into a corner, stockpile guns, become suspicious of any and all who do not look like them, and brace themselves for the globalist, Illuminati-led, Bilderberg-planned, Soros-funded, politically-correct, cultural-Marxist New World Order. Their lack of understanding leads them down a delusional rabbit hole, and their vulnerabilities and insecurities breed a cowardice that drives them to ”punch down” at those who appear even more vulnerable than they. This authoritarian stance taken against class peers, and its need to dominate and brutalize marginalized people, is just waiting to get swept up in the fascist tide. And for many Americans, it inevitably has.

The Struggle Against Inevitability

Since the inevitability of American fascism is deeply rooted in both capitalism and white supremacy, any resistance against this fascist tide must be focused on destroying these two systems. Therefore, the only suitable orientation to embrace is one of a left-wing populist, internationalist, working-class, anti-racist ideology. The black-clad, masked anarchists and anti-fascists who have been physically confronting Trump’s shock troops in the streets are firmly rooted in this orientation. They are the front lines of this struggle, but their effectiveness will ultimately be dependent on a mass, organized movement that includes political and labor-oriented groups on the left, and most importantly liberation groups that are rooted in justice for people of color and immigrant populations.

The upcoming war against American fascism will occur on multiple fronts. First, ground troops of the left (antifa and others) are desperately needed to confront the violent, bigoted, gun-obsessed right wing that has formed under the banner of Americanism. These ground troops must be armed and proficient with guns, physically conditioned, and trained in hand-to-hand combat skills. A guerilla orientation influenced by the teachings of Che Guevara and Abraham

Guillen, among others, and rooted in the approach of the original Black Panther Party and Fred Hampton's rainbow coalition (the BPP, Young Lords, and Young Patriots) is vital. Included in this need are community defense projects that can protect working-class people from the immediate dangers posed by right-wing militia groups, neo-Nazis, white supremacists, and police.

Second, a multi-pronged attack against the capitalist system is needed. This must include a return to militant labor organizing and the inclusion and politicization of low-wage service sector workers. This must also include a left unity project that creates a coalition of anti-capitalist political, labor, and social justice groups that can effectively bring in and give the reins to immigrant laborers, the unemployed and underemployed, and specifically those who are most marginalized due to their racial, gender, or religious identity. A rejection of both capitalist political parties (Democrats and Republicans) is necessary in this struggle, as is a rejection of the lesser-evil approach to electoral politics that has brought the entire system rightward over the past 40 years.

Third, a struggle against government repression is unavoidable. The American government has a brutal history of crushing anti-capitalist dissent: the Haymarket martyrs, the execution of Joe Hill, the targeting and forced exile of Bill Haywood, the Palmer raids, the framing of Sacco and Vanzetti, McCarthyism, Communist blacklists, COINTELPRO, the MOVE bombing, the imprisonment of folks like Mumia Abu-Jamal, Leonard Peltier and Oscar Lopez Rivera, and the forced exile of Assata Shakur, are a few examples. Legitimizing the movement with a formidable, nationally-based political wing can help with this. A third party rooted firmly in anti-capitalism is needed to serve as a vehicle for spreading class consciousness among an American working class that has been strategically and historically shielded from this. While electoral victories would be nearly impossible and largely ineffective in the current structure, political pressure and education is a crucial tool that should be used to create legitimacy and transparency.

This struggle must be carried out with an understanding of the role that liberals and many progressives play in protecting the fascist movement. While conservatives and those on the "alt" and far right represent a clear enemy, liberals can sometimes pose as allies when it comes to mainstream political rhetoric. History shows this is not the case. It shows that no matter how progressive their platforms may appear, liberals will always side with the capitalist system and, most importantly, with their own stability and comfort within the system. This has never been more evident than in their recent support of a proven corporatist and war hawk in Hillary Clinton, their red-baiting propaganda since the election, their blanket condemnation of anti-fascists, their constant cries against counter-violence, and their false equivalencies against "extremists on both sides." The fact that the Democratic Party sabotaged Bernie Sanders, a politician whose platform is nothing more than that of a New Deal liberal, shows how far to the right they have moved since the inception of neoliberalism. Nancy Pelosi's honest proclamation that "we're capitalists and that's just the way it is" while answering an unscripted question from a student at a January "Town hall" appearance perfectly captured the smug elitism of the party, especially when considering Pelosi herself is married to a wealthy "businessman/investor" and has a net worth in the range of \$43 to \$200 million. Capitalism has been great for her and her family; however, not so great for 200 million Americans. And now we have a war on our hands.

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