

## **Fascism: A Reading List with Notes**

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### **Introduction**

*“Fascism fueled hatred and resentment among Italians. Party politics in Italy had become akin to a religious war. Fascism had introduced struggle and tension, and suspicion and animosity into the life of the country” (p. 20).*

**Morena, A. (2015). Mussolini’s decennale : Aura and mythmaking in fascist Italy. University of Toronto Press.**

Fascism comes in many forms and is called by many names. Call it what you will—authoritarianism, dictatorship, Nazism, totalitarianism, strongman rule, despotism, autocracy, tyranny—it is always a form of government in which the people are subjected to the will of one man: the Duce, the Führer, the King, the Kaiser, the Czar, the President.

Today, Fascism is on the rise around the world including, dismayingly, in the United States of America, threatening the rule of law, which is the basis of democracy. In the U. S. Donald Trump, the 2024 Republican nominee for president, has declared himself the standard bearer for authoritarian rule. If he wins, it is likely the United States will cease to be a democracy. If democracy is to survive, it is essential that citizens understand fascism, how it comes into existence, and what it does once it has taken root is essential. That is the reason for this reading list.

On offer here is a range of books—some very old, some quite recent—to give

readers insight into a governmental model some see as the answer to their prayers and some decry as an evil that must be scotched. Some works included are seminal: works by Mussolini and Hitler are virtual founding documents of the fascist movement. Conclusions asserted by British-German philosopher Houston Chamberlain in his 1899 tome gave Hitler the anthropological rationalization for declaring Germans the “master race” and Jews inferior. The books by Evans, Allen and Albright describe the mechanisms by which fascism creeps into power. The Hedges book details the takeover of one part of American life by religious fascists. The book by Levitsky and Ziblatt describes the gradual failure of structures put in place to protect American democracy that then allows fascism to take hold. Snyder’s book describes what can be done to halt fascism’s advance. The Maddow book is a history of efforts by American Nazis to push the United States into World War II *on the side of Germany and Italy* and how that effort was defeated. Rauschnig’s and Salvemini’s works offer a first-hand, critical appraisal of fascism in Germany and Italy. *A Warning* by Anonymous tells Americans what they have to lose if Trump is re-elected and why they must be concerned. This list is by no means exhaustive; there are many books on the subject, both general and subject focused. Nevertheless, it is hoped that these few will provide a blanket of knowledge to complete the reader’s education on a subject of increasingly vital importance.

## The Reading List

**Albright, M. K., & Woodward, W. (2018). *Fascism : A warning*. Harper, an imprint of HarperCollins.**

*“To my mind, a Fascist is someone who identifies strongly with and claims to speak for a whole nation or group, is unconcerned with the rights of others, and is willing to use whatever means are necessary—including violence—to achieve his or her goals” (p. 11).*

Fascism in the twentieth century began in Italy with Benito Mussolini, whose violent radicalism was the outgrowth of economic and social inequality and injustice. Through intimidation and violence, Il Duce, as Mussolini came to be called, ascended to the pinnacle of government, at first introducing reforms and programs that benefited the people. In order to do these things, Mussolini required absolute power, which he achieved by taking over parliament, ending freedom of the press, and taking control of the national police. He even co-opted the Vatican by increasing stipends to priests and shutting down brothels. Fueled by pure vanity, Mussolini declared himself infallible.

Others, most notably Adolf Hitler in Germany, saw Mussolini’s success and chose to follow his lead. After World War II, Stalin in Russia followed as well, lowering what Winston Churchill called an “iron curtain” across eastern Europe.

Not all fascists and fascist sympathizers are alike. Some simply crave political change. Others are motivated by economic desperation, while some want merely to belong to something, to have a sense of engagement with others. Some, of course, join because they hate. Regardless of motivation, fascist organizations sprouted and continue to sprout in many parts of Europe and in the United States.

Following World War II, the world created mechanisms by which it hoped to forestall fascist resurgence. The United Nations is one. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is another. In the former Yugoslavia, NATO succeeded twice in halting Serbian military aggression and ethnic cleansing initiated by Serbian dictator Slobodan Milošević. The intervention ended the conflict and resulted in the indictment of the dictator.

Fascist dictatorships today tend to evolve incrementally by subverting the democratic systems in place in their countries. Hugo Chavez and Nicolás Maduro (Venezuela), Recep Erdoğan (Turkey), Vladimir Putin (Russia), and Viktor Orbán (Hungary) rose to dictatorial power through this step-by-step process.

Donald Trump, who openly admires repressive dictators, is proceeding in a classically authoritarian way, incrementally calling into question the press, the judicial system, the voting system, federal law enforcement, and other pillars of democracy. He sees the world as a competition between winners and losers, rather than as an opportunity for cooperation and generally beneficial progress. His penchants and his attitudes have diminished America's standing in the world. Trump's "America First" ideology is the risen ghost of a movement that emerged originally prior to World War II to keep the U. S. out of the war, a movement that ultimately came to be seen as antisemitic and pro-Nazi. By electing someone with authoritarian tendencies like Trump, the U. S. has chosen to be less admired in the world and less relevant in shaping it. Fascism is a threat more virulent than any threat since World War II. "Trump is the first anti-democratic president in U. S. history" (p. 246). His example, if he is allowed to succeed, will inspire others around the world to

follow it.

[Madeline Albright (1937-2020) served as United Nations ambassador from 1993 to 1997 and Secretary of State from 1997 to 2002 in the Clinton administration. She was also a Distinguished Professor of diplomacy in the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service. William Woodward (1951- ) is a resident of Washington, D. C. and is a contributor to many of Albright's books.]

**Allen, W. (2014). *The Nazi seizure of power : The experience of a single German town, 1922-1945*. Revised edition. Echo Point Books & Media.**

*“There was no real comprehension of what the town would experience if Hitler came to power. No real understanding of what Nazism was”* (p. 281).

The town of Thalburg, Germany, was a small town, yet one fairly well balanced in terms of its population, a mix of religions, incomes, and professions—in other words, a typical small German town. The economy of Thalburg was not greatly affected by the Great Depression at first, with wages constant, savings growing, and employment steady. It was not until the full brutality of the depression made itself felt in Thalburg that the Nazi Party began to make headway with its citizens. By then Thalburgers were tired of the inability of the politicians in parliament to do anything about their situation and looked instead for a party with strong leadership.

Thalburgers were drawn to the energy of the Nazis with their parades and rallies, as well as the occasional physical violence. In Thalburg, as elsewhere in Germany, the Nazis (NSDAP) competed for votes. The Nazis were openly anti-democratic, holding the Weimar Republic and the negotiators of the Versailles Treaty responsible for the dysfunction and

misery within the country. The Nazis made electoral gains through their appeal to nationalism and their adamant insistence on ethnic purity. By drawing in new voters, those who had not previously voted, and voters who had previously supported more marginal parties, the Nazis increased their share of the vote. Other parties just could not compete, because they lacked the brutality and irrationality of the Nazis.

Antisemitism was virtually non-existent in Thalburg before the arrival of Nazism. Antisemitism was an abstract Nazi concept that was accepted only as a concept because Thalburgers accepted Nazism. By summer 1932, “Political violence was becoming a permanent institution” in Thalburg (p. 113). Thalburg took on the appearance of two armed camps preparing for civil war.

Shortly after the elevation of Hitler to the office of Chancellor and the subsequent Reichstag fire, the Nazis began their campaign of suppression of their opponents. The Nazi party moved quickly to consolidate power in Thalburg by imposing itself on every aspect of life, from the government to labor and business and to social clubs as well. Their strategy also included demonizing Jews and cutting Jews off from everything, in spite of how well integrated and accepted Jews had been in pre-Nazi Thalburg.

In October of 1933, the Nazis held a plebiscite to affirm Hitler’s decision to withdraw from the League of Nations. Citizens were verily ordered to vote “yes” in support of Hitler, which they did. On the positive side, the Nazis, through investment in public works, solved Thalburg’s unemployment crisis. Anyone who could work was made to work, whether the work employed their real skills.

The Nazi revolution was effected through “terror, dictatorial control, unremitting

propaganda, the reconstruction of social life, and economic revitalization” (p. 232). Its ready acceptance by the general population was a consequence of, among other things, the depression and the exploitation of class divisions.

After the elections of 1933, there was not another “free election in Thalburg for fifteen years” (p. 158).

[**William Sheridan Allen** (October 5, 1932 – March 14, 2013) was an American historian. He was educated in the United States and Germany.]

**Anonymous. (2019). A warning. Twelve.**

*“The Trump presidency is one of the biggest challenges to our nation’s checks and balances system in modern time. Donald Trump has abused his power to undermine all three branches of government...”* (p. 120).

Senator John McCain’s death was treated by President Trump with stunning disrespect. When McCain, a military hero and long-time public servant, died, Trump refused to order the lowering of flags on federal buildings, including the White House, to half-staff. This pettiness and spitefulness could not be overlooked by the author.

Trump’s decision-making is arbitrary, ill-considered, and executed without the advice of the experts in his administration, leading to chaos, confusion, and the resignation of important aides. Trump has pointed at what he calls the Deep State (government careerists and political opponents in the government) as the agent of frustration, preventing his agenda and stymying his effort to govern as he sees fit. The author, by contrast, refers to efforts to protect the country from Trump’s rashness, impulsiveness, and ill-considered plans as those of the Steady State. The author decries

President Donald Trump's lack of focus, abuses of power, schemes to punish rivals, and overall weakening of vital institutions as reasons for this exposé. Nevertheless, the Steady State's efforts, at least initially, were meant to help Trump be successful in spite of himself.

Months into the Trump presidency, it had become clear to those close to Trump that he was not developing in any way that would be helpful in the performance of his duties. The author cites numerous examples of Trump's erratic behavior, his incomprehensible decision-making process, his refusal to listen to expert advice (insisting he listens only to himself), his refusal to read reports or even listen to briefings. The chaos Trump generated could not be contained, let alone ended. Resignations and firings were the result.

To understand Trump's character, the author applies the standards of a person of good character set out by the Roman philosopher Cicero:

1. Understanding and acknowledging truth;
2. Maintaining good fellowship with men, giving to everyone his due, and keeping faith in contracts and promises;
3. Greatness and strength of a lofty and unconquered mind; and
4. The order and measure that constitute moderation and temperance.

With examples, the author shows that Trump fails in every category. Trump's failure to unequivocally condemn the white supremacist violence in Charlotte, Virginia, is the author's primary example of Trump's failure of character. Trump, for the author, is not just a man who does not have a good character; he is a man who has no character at all.

Trump has labored relentlessly to weaken the several pillars of American



democracy. In detail, the author describes Trump's drive to discredit federal law enforcement when it began investigating Russian interference in the 2016 election, his assault on the judicial system in cases where judges ruled against him, his degrading comments about the intelligence community when their conclusions contradicted his opinions, his disdain for and open opposition to congressional oversight, and his insistence that the voting system is "rigged" against him.

Trump has embraced America's traditional enemies and alienated long-time allies. In his first meeting with the Group of Seven, Trump insulted the organization by showing up late and leaving early. He took pains to personally insult the leaders, with particular aim at Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau, whom Trump called "very dishonest & weak" (p. 153). And while he was engaged in this destructive behavior, Trump championed the return of Russia—expelled for its invasion of Crimea—to the conclave. Trump's full embrace of Russian dictator Vladimir Putin included thanking him for expelling American diplomats.

Trump eagerly rushed to meet face-to-face with Kim Jong-Un, the dictator of North Korea, with whom he "fell in love" (p. 153). Trump praised Philippines president Duterte for his policy of murdering drug users and refused to condemn Mohammed bin Salman, crown prince of Saudi Arabia, for ordering the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. He hailed China's Xi Jinping for making himself president for life. He has called the European Union a foe and has toyed with the idea of leaving NATO.

The author particularly decries the damage done to the body politic by Trump's lies and foul, incendiary language. Citing numerous surveys, the author demonstrates the dangerous divide Trump has created by emasculating the truth and delegitimizing the press.

There are several means by which Trump (or any president) can be removed from office. One is impeachment; another is invocation of the twenty-fifth amendment. But the author sees these as possibly creating more chaos than they stop. The best way of removing a president such as Trump is by voting him out of office.

[**Anonymous** was a member of Donald Trump's administration. He was later identified as Miles Taylor, a senior official in the Department of Homeland Security. His insider account is included in this review of literature on fascism because Donald Trump has exhibited the traits of a fascist leader as delineated by other authors on this list and because he has openly indicated that, if re-elected, he will govern as a dictator, effectively ending the country's constitutional republic.]

**Chamberlain, H. S. (1977). *Foundations of the nineteenth century, Vol. 1.* (J. Lees, Trans.). Howard Fertig.**

*"Physically and mentally the Aryans are pre-eminent among all peoples; for that reason they are by right...the lords of the world"* (p. 542).

History begins with the birth of Jesus Christ, Chamberlain asserts, and thus nations that have not adopted Christianity, such as China, have no real history. In his anthropological analysis of race, the author applies the histories of the Greeks, Romans, and Jews to explain their impacts on nineteenth century Europe. Chamberlain's general racial thesis holds that "Crossing obliterates characters" (p. 284), meaning the inherent traits of one race will tend to be altered and possibly diminished or eliminated by interbreeding with a different race. At the same time, however, he concedes that such a combination could benefit both. In his discussion of the effects of interbreeding,

Chamberlain focuses the bulk of his attention on the Jews.

Racial purity is an essential element of Judaism, according to Chamberlain (pp. 254-255). According to Jewish law, therefore, males must never inter-marry, whereas women may. Though interbreeding can, at times, produce improvements in both races, pure breeding, he argues, has the best results, as seen in pure-bred dogs.

Chamberlain's equivocal attitude toward Jews appears throughout the work. Approval occurs frequently in tandem with criticism as, for example, when he writes that Jews rushed into Europe "like an enemy," but that they "deserve admiration" for being true to "their own individuality" (p. 331).

Despite the author's claim that only the Jews "have positively furthered our culture" (p. 256), he asserts "...true history, the history which still controls the rhythm of our hearts, begins at the moment when the Teuton with his masterful hand lays his grip upon the legacy of antiquity" (p. 257). Though the author admits some benefits to the introduction of Jews to the biology of Europe, he concludes ultimately that "...as a rule mixture of the blood leads to degeneration" (p. 284) so that in the end the Jews have exercised an "undoubtedly fatal" influence on European history (p. 351).

[Philosopher **Houston Stewart Chamberlain** was a British national who settled in Germany and became a German citizen. *Foundations*, first published in 1899, was his most popular book. Chamberlain was a friend of Wilhelm II, son-in-law of Richard Wagner, and an admirer of Adolf Hitler. Chamberlain's *Foundations* is cited on page 269 of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. Only volume one of Chamberlain's monumental two volume work was considered for this review due to unavailability of the second volume.]

**Evans, R. J. (2004). *The coming of the third reich* (1st American ed.). The Penguin Press.**

*“Now the Nazis would set about constructing a racial utopia, in which a pure-bred nation of heroes would prepare as rapidly and as thoroughly as possible for the ultimate test of German racial superiority: a war in which they would crush and destroy their enemies and establish a new European order that would eventually come to dominate the world”* (p. 461).

Evans’ history starts with the Nineteenth Century empire of Otto von Bismark, the “Iron Chancellor,” who inculcated within Germany the idea of the strongman ruler. This image, so indelibly embedded in the national psyche, was a major factor in the failure of the Weimar Republic. Factions formed adamantly opposed to the democracy represented by the post-World War I government. Much of this opposition emerged from the onerous and punitive conditions of the Versailles Treaty which ended the war. In its need to fix blame for Germany’s abject condition, the populace, egged on by antisemitic fanatics, settled on the Jews as appropriate scapegoats. Under these dire circumstances, democracy simply could not work.

Hitler, after failing in his desire to become an artist, rose to prominence among opponents of the republic through his polemical attacks and the frightening violence of his rhetoric. In 1923, Hitler organized and led an attempt to overthrow the government. The putsch failed. Prosecuted for his role in the attempt, Hitler received a slap on the wrist—a prison sentence of five years, of which he served only one. Hitler used this hiatus to formalize his program of national domination in *Mein Kampf* (*My Struggle*).

Hitler was ultimately held forth as the leader of the movement that would restore

German glory. This movement quickly morphed into a cult of personality in which unquestioning loyalty was pledged perforce to Hitler himself and not to the ideology driving the movement. Upon his release from prison, Hitler continued his rabble rousing, though in such a way that he could not be held legally liable for the outrages his followers perpetrated. His desires, though suggested and never expressed, were nevertheless clear to his listeners, and they responded with appropriate savagery.

Germans never adjusted from the authoritarian system under Kaiser Wilhelm and then Bismark. Their parliamentary system never worked for the good of the people, hamstrung as it was by the onerous conditions of the Versailles Treaty and because so many factions in the representative body did not want it to work and refused to let it work. Thus, the republic ultimately was destroyed from within.

The Nazi stratagem for this destruction relied on several things, among them the scapegoating of Jews and the resort to violence as a legitimate tool toward a political end. At first, the Nazis sought power within the parliamentary context: there were several elections in which the Nazi Party was a contender, and its support gradually grew among a population increasingly dissatisfied with the efforts of its republican government to provide stability, safety, and economic growth.

Upon succeeding to power, the Nazis engaged in an organized program of “co-ordination,” their euphemism for brutally enforcing conformity with truncheons, fists, and guns. Though the majority of German voters had consistently opposed the Nazis at the polls, they eventually flocked to the party in droves, urged principally by fear. With indiscriminate and brazen ruthlessness, Nazi stormtroopers infiltrated and invaded every

facet of life in Germany, enforcing the Party's concept of Germanness.

[**Sir Richard Evans** is a British historian. His area of study is Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries, with a particular emphasis on Germany. The book reviewed here is the first in Evans' *The Third Reich Trilogy*.]

**Hedges, C. (2006). American fascists: the Christian right and the war on America.**

**Free Press.**

*"...when fealty to an ideology becomes a litmus test for individual worth, tyranny follows"*  
(p. 181).

The Christian Right in America, through a process of logocide (the killing of words) combined with doctrinaire intolerance, seeks to establish a homogenous nation ruled by "Christian values" that include justifiable violence against those who do not conform. Male domination is a prime characteristic of the movement, whereby males rule at every level of society and women are subservient.

Conformity in sexuality is another characteristic of the movement: anything other than heterosexuality is to be condemned. Anyone exhibiting same-sex attraction is diseased and must be cured. The movement seeks to control what people believe to be true by creating fictions and alternate realities, e. g., creationism (belief that the bible's story of creation is literally true). It is also characterized by greed, as seen in the avarice of those who proselytize the gospel of prosperity.

[**Chris Hedges** is a graduate of Harvard Divinity School. He has worked as a journalist for decades and was a winner of the Pulitzer Prize in 2002.]

**Hitler, A. (1971). *Mein kampf*. Houghton Mifflin.**

*“All the human culture, all the results of arts, science, and technology that we see before us today, are almost exclusively the creative product of the Aryan” (290).*

Volume One: A Reckoning

After both his parents died, the Austrian-born Hitler, as a teenager, moved to Vienna to pursue an art career, but failed the entrance test for the Academy of Fine Arts. During his time in Vienna, Hitler evolved his ideas on Germanness, asserting “One blood demands one Reich” (p. 3). He was also exposed to and embraced antisemitism as, in his view, Jews were not German. He also developed a hatred for the Social Democratic movement, which, as far as he knew, was promoted by Jews. This was also the period when Hitler developed his appreciation for terror as a means to an end. “Terror,” he wrote, “...will always be successful unless opposed by equal terror” (p. 44).

At one time a supporter of parliamentary democracy, Hitler’s attitude changed when the Austrian parliament became dominated by Social Democrats, who favored the non-German population. On realizing that Austria’s parliamentary democracy was engaged in the “Slavization” of the nation to the detriment of ethnic Germans, Hitler left Vienna for Munich. In Munich, Hitler’s political awakening continued. He considered the Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy) flawed, believing Italy to be unreliable and Austria-Hungary not likely to risk itself on behalf of Germany due to that country’s focus on its non-German population. He also considered that territorial expansion was essential to national survival and that, in Germany’s case, that expansion should be eastward, into Russia.

The outbreak of World War I brought several things into focus. One was Hitler's enthusiasm for war. Another was his conviction that Austria would not help its German allies. The war sharpened Hitler's opposition to Marxism, which, to Hitler's mind, was dedicated to "the destruction of all non-Jewish states..." (p. 168). At this time, Hitler began thinking of engaging in politics.

The war also taught Hitler the value of propaganda and the impact it could have on the masses. Hitler's political involvement began in earnest after the war, while he was still in the army. This led to his membership in the German Workers' Party. The decline of the Reich after World War I could be seen in the decline of art and architecture, and Bolshevism (*i.e.*, Jews) was responsible. Hitler declared the parliament to be "the most irresponsible institution of all times..." (p. 271).

Regarding racial purity, Hitler felt that mixing races was unnatural, a view expressed in 1899 by Britisher Houston Stewart Chamberlain. The mixing of higher and lower races results in the lowering of the higher race through generations of interbreeding. In this regard, the Jew "becomes 'a ferment of decomposition' among peoples and races, and in the broader sense a dissolver of human culture" (p. 447).

#### Volume Two: The National Socialist Movement

Hitler held to the concept of "folkish," which, as translated in Hitler's mind, meant an embrace of traditional, national values and rejection of modernity. The purpose of education was to develop strong men and women who can withstand pain. Thus, there should be an emphasis on physical education. The young must believe they are superior to all others and that men are for fighting and women are for breeding. Toward those ends,



education should focus on only that which is useful and should include only that which can be remembered. Too much depth and detail was unnecessary.

In government, no decision can ever be made by any chamber of parliament; its role is advisory only, not determinative. There should be no majority rule. Though “every man will have advisers by his side...*the decision will be made by one man*” (p. 449).

[**Adolf Hitler** (1889-1945) became leader of the Nazi party in 1921. He drafted *Mein Kampf* in prison following the failed 1923 Beer Hall Putsch. In 1933, he became chancellor of Germany, in which capacity he served until his death by suicide.]

**Levitsky, S. & Ziblatt, D. (2018). *How democracies die*. First Edition. Crown.**

“*Potential demagogues exist in all democracies*” (p. 20).

Historically, the overthrow of democratic governments has occurred by violent means, such as a military coup d'état. Democratically elected leaders were removed from office, arrested, exiled, even murdered. The authors report that this is hardly the case anymore. They argue that most of the time democracy is supplanted by authoritarianism, it is by legal means, employing the mechanisms of democracy to undermine democracy. To illustrate, they provide many examples from the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries, from Italy and Germany to Venezuela and Turkey. The authors present numerous examples of rising authoritarians using the levers of democratic power in a gradual, step-by-step drive to establish themselves as sole power and authority. Steps include packing the courts with supporters and using the courts to sue or imprison rivals, co-opting opponents through bribery or intimidation, and using the state's security apparatus to engineer crises that require extraordinary measures like suspending the constitution.

The process often begins when the current, democratic government, in a moment of crisis, joins with an authoritarian leader and party in the hopes of quelling the crisis. This alliance is misguidedly reliant on the democratic segment of the alliance being able to control the authoritarian.

The authors posit four key behavioral signals for identifying an authoritarian:

1. Rejection of (or weak commitment to) democratic rules of the game.
2. Denial of the legitimacy of political opponents.
3. Toleration or encouragement of violence.
4. Readiness to curtail civil liberties of opponents, including media (pp. 65-67).

The authors then cite behavioral political scientist Nancy Bermeo who suggests ways pro-democracy parties can distance or isolate authoritarians:

1. Keep would-be authoritarians off party ballots,
2. Root out extremists in the grass roots of their own party.
3. Avoid alliances with antidemocratic parties and candidates.
4. Avoid acts (such as joint rallies) that legitimize extremists.
5. Whenever extremists emerge as serious political contenders, form alliances with other parties that are pro democratic, even those that might normally be ideologically in opposition (24-26).

The gatekeeping function in the US was originally accomplished by the Electoral College. Over time, however, the parties took this on, freezing out American demagogues like Henry Ford and Charles Lindbergh. Ultimately, the primary system was adopted by both Democrats and Republicans and continues to serve as gatekeeper. Such

“gatekeeping,” they say, has been remarkably successful in the United States...until 2016.

Republicans in 2016 abdicated their gatekeeping function when it allowed Donald Trump, in spite of his overtly authoritarian leanings, to run for the presidency. With publicly available evidence, the authors evince how Donald Trump, in full view of everyone, checked off all four of the indicators of burgeoning authoritarianism.

The authors argue that, while the Constitution might be the thing that has guided the United States through the centuries, it would not be effective without the “guardrails” that support it, the unwritten rules by which parties have traditionally agreed to abide in order to allow the country to function, mostly free of serious conflict. These guardrails, or norms, are reliant on two principles: mutual toleration (the idea that as long as opponents play by the rules, they have an equal right to exist and to govern) and institutional forbearance (choosing not to exercise an advantage which may nevertheless be legal to exercise).

These two principles, the authors argue, have been eroded since the advent of Republican congressman Newt Gingrich in the House of Representatives, beginning with Gingrich’s insistence that Republicans in congress oppose and block everything proposed by the Democratic president. This oppositional behavior has worsened over the intervening years to the point that inter-party civility in congress has been replaced by hatred. In other countries, this transition has led to the destruction of democracy.

The authors posit three potential futures for America post-Trump. The most optimistic (and most unlikely) is that Trump and the Republicans be voted out of office, allowing Democrats to restore the guardrails Trump *et al.* have demolished. A darker scenario is

one in which Republicans control every branch of government, allowing them to further degrade the democracy to their permanent advantage. The most likely scenario is that polarization continues and increases so that guardrails continue to deteriorate over time.

Opposing Trump by adopting the same “hardball” tactics as Republicans, the authors argue, would be counter-productive in that it would only lead to greater and faster deterioration of the guardrails of democracy. Rather, they see coalition building among disparate and even opposing groups as the way to stop Trump’s drive to authoritarianism. Politicians can contribute to this effort by eschewing continued opposition and returning to cooperation in governance. The basic norms that once protected American democracy must be restored and—more than that—they must be extended throughout society.

[**Steven Levitsky** (b. 1968) and **Daniel Ziblatt** (b. 1972) are Harvard University political science professors.]

**Maddow, R. (2023). Prequel: an American fight against fascism. Crown Publishing Group.**

*“The Nazis’ plain intent was to add stress to the cracks and fissures already visible in American political life”* (p. 208).

In the 1920’s and ’30’s, a significant swath of the American population sympathized with or supported the fascist form of government brought into being by the Nazis in Germany. American fascists not only approved of Hitler and his policies, but actively opposed the New Deal policies of President Franklin Roosevelt. Many of these supporters of fascism travelled to Germany to observe the Hitler phenomenon firsthand; they returned with the idea of emulating Der Führer’s style of transformation, such emulation extending

even to uniforms: America's Silver Shirts were a nod to Hitler's storm troopers, the Brown Shirts. There were even youth indoctrination camps, imitations of the Hitler Youth camps. Though many of these Hitler acolytes were civilians in private life, they were assisted in their efforts to subvert American democracy by many in law enforcement and in government, some of the latter themselves elected officials. They were also assisted with money and strategy by the German government itself and by eminent Americans such as the antisemitic Henry Ford.

American fascists engaged in propaganda, just as the Nazis had in Germany, distributing leaflets, publishing pro-Nazi newspapers, and linking themselves to high-profile media figures like Father Charles Coughlin. A significant part of the propaganda consisted of vilification of Jews, convincing Americans that Jews were essentially behind everything the average American considered detrimental. The Great Depression assisted in convincing many, inasmuch as they saw wealthy, scheming Jews as the instigators of the economy's collapse.

This bigoted attitude was elevated by the totally bankrupt conspiracy theory embodied in the screed, *The Protocols of the Meetings of the Learned Elders of Zion*, that blamed Jews for the overthrow of the Russian czar and of plotting to literally take over the world. Jews were therefor seen as Bolsheviks and Communists: according to the propaganda, every Jew was a Bolshevik and every Bolshevik a Jew. And there were Jews in every aspect of American life, from business, to government, to filmmaking. All were to be targeted when the government of the United States was overthrown by the growing fascist movement and its growing arsenal.

A propaganda campaign, funded by the German government, was intended to keep the United States out of the war in Europe by fomenting internecine conflict within the U.S.

Attempts by the U. S. Department of Justice to try Nazi agents for sedition failed.

[**Rachel Maddow** (b. 1973) is host of “The Rachel Maddow Show” on MSNBC. She earned a PhD in political science from the University of Oxford.]

**Mussolini, B. (1936). *Fascism: doctrine and institutions*. Ardita.**

*“After socialism, Fascism trains its guns on the whole block of democratic ideologies, and rejects both their premises and their practical applications and implements” (p. 21)*

This collection of documents from the 1920’s and ’30’s expounds on the fascist idea and delineates the organizational structure of the fascist state, its obligations to its citizens, and, conversely, the obligations of the citizens to the state. The fascist state is all-important; it accepts the individual only to the extent individual interests coincide with those of the state; it must exist and must absorb all the energies, interests, and hopes of the people, if the people are to be made powerful. There is no human value outside of the state, and whatever brings the individual closer to the state advantages the state. Fascism is opposed to any form of democracy that equates nationhood with a numerical majority: a nation should be conceived from the perspective of quality, not quantity.

Peace is cowardice: the fascist state sees no use for pacifism; it sees war as a noble pursuit, international structures as weak, and democracy as “a kingless regime infested by many kings...” (p. 21). The document “The Fundamental Laws of Fascism” is a blueprint for the Italian fascist government, delineating fascist programs respecting labor, the political and economic systems, and the social and educational systems. It provides

regulations governing the conduct of labor in the fascist state, wherein work is defined as “a social duty” and the nation as “an organism having ends, life and means superior in power and duration to the single individuals...” (p. 133).

In the fascist governmental hierarchy, the head of government is the king, who appoints the Prime Minister, who then acts as the Head of the Government. No bill may be proposed in parliament without the Head of the Government’s consent, and anyone offending the Head of the Government in any way is subject to imprisonment.

The organizational mandates of the fascist doctrine prescribe membership for all children of either sex in a program of physical and moral training leading to military service. Social programs such as unemployment and disability insurance are mandated in the fundamental laws.

[**Benito Mussolini** (1883-1945) was the founder of the Fascist Party in Italy. He served as Prime Minister of Italy from 1922 to 1945.]

**Rauschnig, H. (1939). *The revolution of nihilism : warning to the west* (E. W. Dickes, Trans.). Alliance Book Corporation; Longmans, Green & Co.**

*“Whatever it cannot dominate it must destroy, whatever it cannot absorb and master must go. Such is the barbaric maxim of National Socialism. It is the process of an enemy occupation of all vital elements in the nation, ending in their destruction”* (p. 88).

National Socialism is not a governing philosophy, though its drive is to revolutionize the practices of government, which can be accomplished only under the rule of an absolute leader. The ascent of such a leader is predicated on the destruction of the existing public order. This is accomplished through a process of exploitation such that rifts

within the enemy nation are exposed and irritated to bring about internal disunity and distrust of the existing order. Propaganda—lies “adorned with a show of virtue” (p. 46)—produce confusion and dissension, opening the door to National Socialist domination and the end of the individual.

National Socialism disdains democracy. In Hitler’s view, democracy is doomed, corrupt, and putrefying. Indeed, the inactivity of the European democracies gave an opening for National Socialism to re-create Germany’s war machine and to openly stoke aggression. We may tolerate what seems, at first, intolerable because of the fear that what we now dread is merely temporary and that what may come to replace it will be worse. Nevertheless, the National Socialist regime and its nihilism must be removed. The collapse of Western civilization can be prevented only by a rebirth of the constitutional order in Europe.

**[Hermann Rauschning (1887-1982) was a high official in the Nazi Party and President of the Senate of the Free City of Danzig from 1933 to 1934. He quit the party and left Germany, eventually settling in the United States and becoming an American citizen.]**

**Salvemini, G. (1938). *Italian fascism*. V. Gollancz.**

*“In a dictatorship one party alone—the party in power—is allowed to exist. One man controls the central machinery of government” (p. 8).*

In a clearly mocking tone intended to debunk the self-proclaimed benefits of fascism, Salvemini surveys the ideology of fascism and the consequences thereof. Several characteristics define fascism in Italy:

1. Elected local government is abolished;



2. The executive is not dependent on the legislature;
3. The government can modify existing laws and enact new ones by decree;
4. Any activity critical of the government, even if taking place in a private residence, is punishable;
5. Educational institutions are charged with teaching what the party charges it to teach;
6. Books and newspapers, if found “distasteful” to the government, are to be censored;
7. Religious institutions may not express anything critical of the government;
8. Practitioners of the legal professions (lawyers, judges) who oppose the government will not be allowed to practice their profession;
9. The police are allowed to open letters;
10. Citizens must be in possession of their papers at all times, and no one may leave the country without a “regular” passport. Egress will be only by “authorized routes.” Anyone attempting to leave the country by any unauthorized route may be summarily executed by the guards (pp. 10-13).

Labor unions are permitted, but striking is not. The unions’ leaders are not elected by the union’s members but are appointed by the government. The nation is comprised of provinces, departments, corporations, and confederations. There are hierarchies for every facet of Italian life, each of which has a head, various sub-heads, and numerous sub-sub-heads. All are appointed, directly or indirectly, by Mussolini.

Italy’s economic situation suffered due to the Great Depression, which was made

worse by the economic policies of the fascist regime. Spending and debt increased, and wages declined, while unemployment increased. Adding to this dilemma was Mussolini's desire to establish an Italian empire to compete with other European colonial powers. Mussolini invaded Ethiopia in 1935, increasing the financial burden on Italy's people.

The author indicts fascism under Mussolini of "the one crime the Italians should never forgive: the mud systematically flung at the entire nation of their birth in order to exalt a single man" (p. 94).

[**Gaetano Salvemini** (1873-1957) was an Italian historian and anti-fascist. He taught at several universities in Italy until forced into exile due to the rise of fascism. During his exile in the United States, he taught at Harvard University. After World War II, he resumed teaching in Italy.]

**Snyder, T. (2017). *On tyranny: twenty lessons from the twentieth century*. Tim Duggan Books / Penguin Random House LLC.**

*"The mistake is to assume that rulers who came to power through institutions cannot change or destroy those very institutions—even when that is exactly what they have announced that they will do"* (p. 24).

The history of the twentieth century informs the present of the nature of tyranny. These lessons are self-evident yet bear reminding when political order is threatened. When such threats arise, it is a mistake to assume that precedent or heritage will by itself protect the political order. It is important, when threats to the political order appear, to not instantly obey the dictates of those threats but to vigorously defend the institutions of democracy that are thus threatened. Tyranny implies a one-party system; it is therefore

imperative to defend a system of multiple parties by voting or running for office, but in any case, defend the multi-party system. Do not tolerate the visual symbols of tyranny.

Citizens must retain and maintain accepted standards of ethics, lest they become as corrupt as the tyrant. Do not be afraid to stand out in your opposition to tyranny. Winston Churchill was the lone holdout among European leaders in fighting back against Hitler.

Beware of tyranny's misuse of language; citizens should expose themselves to language by reading so they will understand how language can both convey and disguise ideas. Citizens who read can then investigate for themselves the veracity of the tyrant's pronouncements. Citizens must commit themselves to recognizing and accepting the truth so they can then reject the lies of the tyrant no matter how often they are repeated. Opponents of tyranny must emerge from their cocoons in order to relate to others with whom they may not have anything in common.

It should be understood that the tyrant will seize on a real or manufactured incident of terror in order to justify taking control of the government. The mysterious Reichstag fire in Germany was such an event; it resulted in the complete takeover of the German government by the Nazis. Resistance to the advance of tyranny requires true patriotism and courage. History presents us with patterns we can use to make judgements. It is especially important for young people to know history in order to avoid history's traps.

[**Timothy Snyder** (b. 1969) is a professor of history at Yale University.]

### **Fascism in Fiction, Film, and Theatre**

Fascism has also been the subject of many creative works. Sinclair Lewis's novel *It Can't Happen Here* and Bertolt Brecht's satirical play *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*

speculate how fascism can insinuate itself into otherwise liberal societies. Bernardo Bertolucci's film *The Conformist* is a portrait of the corruption of the individual that can result from fascism, while *The Great Dictator*, a film by Charley Chaplin is an unsubtly mocking portrayal of Adolf Hitler that makes the case for democracy. George Orwell's *1984*, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* are dystopian visions of societies under the thumb of fascist dictators. *The Man in the High Castle* is Philip K. Dick's alternative history of the United States following its defeat by the Axis allies in World War II. Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men* tells the tale of a man who starts his political life as a populist but ends it as a fascist demagogue. These works and others by some of the most accomplished artists in their fields express a common fear of dictatorship which is the inevitable result of fascist government.