

I Alone Can Fix It: Trump, Mussolini, and the Crisis of Authority
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On June 16, 2015, Donald J. Trump — real estate mogul, reality television personality, and self-declared savior of American democracy — announced his candidacy for the office of President of the United States. In his official campaign announcement, which he delivered at a rally in Trump Tower, his New York City skyscraper, Trump lamented the current state of the nation. “Our country is in serious trouble,” he remarked, “We don't have victories anymore. We used to have victories, but we don't have them. When was the last time anybody saw us beating, let's say, China in a trade deal? They kill us. I beat China all the time. All the time.”¹ Concerning America’s reputation among the international community, Trump simply stated, “They're laughing at us, at our stupidity. [...] The U.S. has become a dumping ground for everybody else's problems.”² At this point in the speech, supporters in the audience began chanting, “We want Trump. We want Trump.”³ Seizing on his rhetorical momentum, Trump declared, “Well, you need somebody, because politicians are all talk, no action. Nothing's gonna get done.”⁴ For the assembled chanters, action was precisely what the nation needed most, and Donald Trump, a candidate extramural to the gridlock and platitudes of establishment politics, was their champion.

After several similar attacks on the perceived incompetence of incumbent American politicians, Trump announced that he would seek the presidency in the general election of 2016. Trump described the necessity of his election, saying, “We need a leader that can bring back our jobs, can bring back our manufacturing, can bring back our military, can take care of our vets. Our vets have been abandoned.”⁵ In his announcement, Trump coined a phrase which thousands

¹ "Full Text: Donald Trump Announces a Presidential Bid." Washington Post. June 16, 2015. Accessed October 09, 2016.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

of campaign posters, signs, and television ads would boast a year later. “We need somebody that can take the brand of the United States and make it great again,” Trump resolved.⁶ He would repeat this mantra a total of nine times throughout his forty-five minute speech.

To the shock of the American mainstream political and media establishment, Trump enjoyed the highest polling figures out of all seventeen Republican presidential candidates within two months of announcing his campaign.⁷ Within a year of announcing his candidacy, Trump had won decisive and stunning electoral victories, vanquishing his rivals in the Republican primaries, winning the nomination of his party, and carrying Election Day. But Donald Trump’s political victories represent more than the triumph of one unlikely candidate.

In the words of a Trump campaign advertisement released in September of 2016, “It’s a movement, not a campaign; its leader, Donald Trump: builder, businessman, success: doing what others call impossible.”⁸ Indeed, joining fiery charisma with a message of patriotism, political action, and national rebirth, Donald Trump created a core of ardent supporters who would march beside him on the path to the White House, where they hoped to renew America to its former glory.

For the duration of the 2016 campaign season, American political pundits and media commentators of all persuasions responded to Donald Trump’s candidacy by attaching the politically-charged epithet “fascist” to his campaign, policy proposals, and supporters. Cries of “fascist” varied from prime time hyperbole, sarcasm, and, in many circles, genuine conviction. An article in *Forbes* from May 2016 warned, “Yes, A Trump Presidency Would Bring Fascism

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Agiesta, Jennifer. "CNN/ORC Poll: Trump Now Competitive in General Election." CNN. August 19, 2015. Accessed October 09, 2016.

⁸ Corasaniti, Nick. "Donald Trump’s ‘Movement’ Ad: Positive Message, Subtle Dig." *Www.NYTimes.com*. September 24, 2016. Accessed October 9, 2016.

to America.”⁹ On July 22, 2017, *The Washington Post* featured an online opinion piece entitled, “Donald Trump’s Creepy Fascist Infomercial” in which writer Alexandra Petri compared Donald Trump’s candidacy to the dystopian premonitions of George Orwell’s *1984*.¹⁰ Invoking the names of two of history’s most despotic rulers, an article published in *Salon* on March 11, 2016 read, “Trump’s not Hitler, he’s Mussolini: How GOP Anti-Intellectualism Created a Modern Fascist Movement in America.”¹¹ On the political right, the *National Review*, William F. Buckley’s renowned conservative periodical, sympathized tepidly with its usual leftist opponents in an article titled “The F-Word,” in which contributor Jay Nordlinger asserted that, “Trump is something other than an exponent of liberal democracy.”¹² Just as Trump’s mission to make America great again stirred memories of glory, progress, and hope in the hearts of his supporters, it conjured images of totalitarianism, violence, and swastikas in the minds of opponents.

Donald Trump’s supporters did not respond mildly to accusations of fascist sympathies. Eleven months into Trump’s candidacy, *The New York Times* published an article entitled “Rise of Donald Trump Tracks Growing Debate Over Global Fascism,” in which writer Peter Baker noted,

To supporters, such comparisons [to fascism] are deeply unfair smear tactics used to tar conservatives and scare voters. For a bipartisan establishment whose foundation has been shaken by Mr. Trump’s ascendance, these backers say, it is easier to delegitimize his support than to acknowledge widespread popular anger at the failure of both parties to confront the nation’s challenges.¹³

⁹ Kagan, Robert. "Yes, A Trump Presidency Would Bring Fascism To America." *Www.Forbes.com*. May 31, 2016. Accessed October 09, 2016.

¹⁰ Petri, Alexandra. "Donald Trump’s Creepy Fascist Infomercial." *Washington Post*. July 22, 2016. Accessed October 09, 2016.

¹¹ Buric, Fedja. "Trump’s Not Hitler, He’s Mussolini: How GOP Anti-intellectualism Created a Modern Fascist Movement in America." *Www.Salon.com*. March 11, 2016. Accessed October 9, 2016.

¹² Nordlinger, Jay. "The F-Word." *Www.NationalReview.com*. June 20, 2016. Accessed October 09, 2016. <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/436808/donald-trump-fascism-he-or-isnt-he>.

¹³ Baker, Peter. "Rise of Donald Trump Tracks Growing Debate Over Global Fascism." *Www.NYTimes.com*. 2016. Accessed October 09, 2016.

The language of fascism, while rallying some to oppose Trump's candidacy with greater resolve, entrenched many of Trump's supporters. Throughout the campaign season, Trump's most passionate apologists regarded the mainstream media's association of Donald Trump with fascism as a dishonest political ploy. For Trump's defenders, the perception that the national media was attempting to manipulate the electorate via slander and name-calling confirmed the narrative of their leader, specifically that the political establishment viewed Donald Trump as an existential threat.

Implicit in every discussion over Donald Trump and his position regarding fascism is the nature of fascism itself. Although many have accused Trump of fomenting a fascist movement in the legacy of Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler, fascism remains generally ambiguous in the polarized political dialogue of 2016. Given that the most horrific atrocities of the twentieth century are popularly credited to fascism and its success in Italy, Germany, and other nations, charges that Donald Trump is the standard-bearer of fascism in contemporary America require serious attention. Such charges make necessary a renewed analysis concerning fascist theory and history, which I explore in this paper, moving beyond a mere taxonomy of fascism in an effort to elucidate the possible implications of a resurgent fascism in contemporary America.

Using the political theory of Roger Griffin, Antonio Gramsci, and other intellectuals, this paper explores the ideology of fascism and evaluates the claim that Donald Trump's presidential candidacy represents the rise of fascism in twenty-first-century America. This paper examines fascist documents and speeches from the interwar period in conjunction with speeches and advertisements from Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, focusing on a selection of critical questions: First, what are the central tenets and goals of Fascism? What does it mean to

be a fascist in 2016 as opposed to being a fascist in 1926? Is Fascism merely a discredited ideology existent only in the dustbin of history? What parallels, if any, exist between the political ideals, rhetoric, tactics, and aspirations of Benito Mussolini and Donald Trump? And, ultimately, this paper asks if a meaningful comparison can be drawn between the current American political landscape and the political landscape of Italy in the immediate post-World War I period, where fascism first flourished.

The Fascist Common Denominator

Any comparison between Donald Trump's Make America Great Again campaign and the Fascist movement of Benito Mussolini requires a comprehensive definition of fascism itself.¹⁴ Establishing such a definition appears a somewhat elusive task. Historically, fascism has assumed distinct forms in disparate national contexts. In Italy, the National Fascist Party pursued a political program that emphasized the cultural reawakening of the nation, a national rebirth in the spirit of the ancient Roman Empire. In Germany, the Nazi Party emphasized national strength through racial purity. Meanwhile, in other nations, such as Spain, Romania, and Argentina, fascist leaders and movements valorized national militarization, a strong centralized economy, and an ardent disdain for communism.¹⁵

¹⁴ This paper employs both an uppercase and lowercase spelling of the word *fascism*. The lowercase *fascism* describes any movement, person, ideology, or political party which aligns with the general principles of the National Fascist Party, the first explicitly fascist entity which ruled Italy under Benito Mussolini throughout the interwar period. Use of the uppercase *Fascism* refers directly to the members, policies, and ideological tenets of Mussolini's National Fascist Party.

¹⁵ Linz, Juan J. *Fascism, A Reader's Guide: Analyses, Interpretations, Bibliography*. Edited by Walter Laqueur. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1976. p. 10.

However, significant variations between historical fascist movements do not preclude the creation of a comprehensive definition of fascism. According to Juan Linz, a professor of Sociology and Political Science at Yale University,

Conflicts between fascist powers, different emphases in their ideology and policies are not an argument against the use of a broader category of fascism as the divergences between the Russian leadership, Mao, and even Tito do not prevent us from speaking of communism.¹⁶

At the heart of all fascist movements lies a nucleus of ideological principles. Establishing these core principles proves a difficult task due to what Linz calls, “the ‘anti’ character of fascism.”¹⁷ Unlike other ideologies — conservatism, communism, liberalism, monarchism, etc. — fascism does not define itself through positive affirmation of certain beliefs and policies. Instead, fascism is rooted in dogmatic opposition to non-fascist beliefs and committed to antagonism toward non-fascist parties.

For Roger Griffin, author of *The Nature of Fascism* and Principal Lecturer in History at Oxford Brookes University, the quintessence of fascism resides within this anti-character as well as the fascist use of mythology in constructing and sustaining national political and cultural narratives.¹⁸ In moments of national crises, fascists employ cultural mythology and Romanticism as a means of inspiring nationalism and hastening cultural rebirth.

The notion of a national rebirth, a key fascist precept, reveals the distinctive way in which fascists conceive of the state. Griffin notes that fascism necessarily holds, “that a ‘nation’ is an entity which can ‘decay’ and be ‘regenerated.’”¹⁹ This view of the nation as an organism,

¹⁶ Ibid, 11.

¹⁷ Ibid, 15.

¹⁸ Griffin, Roger. *Fascism*. Oxford Readers. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995. p. 3.

¹⁹ Ibid.

“with a distinct life-cycle, collective psyche, and communal destiny,” promotes a spirit of hostility towards non-fascist ideologies or forces.²⁰ Fascists view rival ideologies as a kind of cancer to the body of the state. Using this same logic, the state and its citizens, like the human body and its cells, must endure exertion and discipline in order to resist virulent pathogens. For this reason, fascists valorize military service and violence as a necessary means of political action, holding militarism as a necessary precondition for national flourishing.

Dovetailing the anti-character of fascism, the fascist mythology of national rebirth, and the inherent militarism of fascism, Griffin offers a list of ten principles that define all fascist movements. Although minor disagreements exist between academics and historians concerning the exact tenets of fascism, Griffin’s list identifies the common denominators of a seemingly unclassifiable ideology.²¹

*Roger Griffin’s Ten Core Tenets of Fascism*²²

1. Fascism is anti-liberal.
2. Fascism is anti-conservative.
3. Fascism tends to operate as a charismatic form of politics.
4. Fascism is anti-rational. Fascists emphasize the importance of emotion and action in politics, regarding dialogue, diplomacy, and intellectualism as an impotent and elitist form of politics. For this reason, violence holds both symbolic and practical significance in fascist movements.
5. Fascism is anti-communist, yet it incorporates elements of socialism in calling for the transcendence of class in society.
6. Fascism is connected implicitly to authoritarianism and involves the worship of both physical strength and political power.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

7. Fascism is a populist form of politics. Fascist movements draw their support from disaffected members of the middle and working-classes.
8. Fascism is racist in that, as an ultra-nationalist ideology, it emphasizes the celebration of an organically conceived nation or culture and the rejection of others as inferior.
9. Fascism is internationalist. This tenet poses a paradox for fascism. While anti-internationalist in its essentialist treatment of national distinctiveness and cultural identity, fascism ultimately encourages international alliances between fascists. The need for such alliances rises from the fact that all fascists are engaged in a shared struggle for national rebirth against common enemies such as communists, liberals, monarchs, etc. Put simply, fascists believe that France should be French and Germany should be German, and that international alliances should serve the interests of nationalism.
10. Fascism is politically eclectic and varies according to national context. As an ideology defined by its opposition to other ideologies, fascism has the unique capacity to synthesize and appropriate tenets from rival ideologies for its own ideological ends.

It is important to note that any person or party that adheres to any one or two of these tenets does not automatically join ranks with fascists. It is possible to advocate racism, totalitarianism, anti-liberalism, or anti-rationalism without being a fascist. However, any movement that identifies as fascist must adhere in some degree to each of these ten principles.

Gramscian Hegemony and the Crisis of Authority

Just as Griffin's ten core tenets of fascism elucidate the theoretical underpinnings of fascist ideology, the political theory of Antonio Gramsci, Italy's premier Marxist intellectual of the interwar period, contextualizes the cultural and political conditions in which fascism incubates. Considered together, the writings of Griffin and Gramsci offer a firm intellectual foundation for a comparative analysis of Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign with Benito Mussolini's Fascist movement of the 1920s.

Born on the island of Sardinia in 1891, Antonio Gramsci achieved intellectual prominence during World War I as the editor of *Avanti!*, the official publication of the Italian Socialist Party. Plagued throughout his adult years by chronic ill health, Gramsci died in 1937 after spending eleven years as a political prisoner in Fascist Italy. Despite his short career as an intellectual, Gramsci produced a handful of highly influential works, such as his *Prison Notebooks* and *Political Writings*.²³ Central in Gramsci's work is the question of how states construct and maintain what Gramsci termed cultural hegemony, a concept which contemporary political and historical theorists employ extensively today in their respective disciplines.²⁴

The Gramscian theory of cultural hegemony asserts that a singular dominant social class can rule various subordinate social classes by controlling cultural institutions and the dissemination of culture. A class secures hegemonic status when its ideas, beliefs, and traditions become normative among the social groups that it seeks to dominate, supplanting the native values, traditions and beliefs of the subordinate classes. In his *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci describes what he terms, "The 'normal' exercise of hegemony" as being,

characterized by the combination of force and consent variously balancing one another, without force exceeding consent too much. Indeed one tries to make it appear that force is supported by the consent of the majority, expressed by the so-called organs of public opinion — newspapers and associations — which are therefore, in certain situations, artificially increased in number.²⁵

Under successful hegemonic conditions, the cultural influence of the dominant social class pervades all aspects of society while simultaneously remaining imperceptible to members of subordinate classes.

²³ Balibar, Étienne. *The Philosophy of Marx*. London: Verso, 1995. p. 53.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Gramsci, Antonio. *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916-1935*. Edited by David Forgacs. First ed. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2000. p. 261

The failure of a potentially hegemonic class to assert itself culturally over subordinate classes results in what Gramsci dubs, “a ‘crisis of authority.’”²⁶ Such crises, Gramsci notes, occur when,

the ruling class has failed in some major political undertaking for which it has requested, or forcibly extracted, the consent of the broad masses (war, for example), or because huge masses (especially of peasants and petty-bourgeois intellectuals) have passed suddenly from a state of political passivity to a certain activity, and put forward demands which [...] add up to revolution.²⁷

A captive of the Italian Fascist state living in the shadow of World War I, Gramsci himself wrote from within a society that had recently witnessed precisely such a crisis of authority.

The State of Disunion: Italy and the Road to Fascism

The ascent of Benito Mussolini and the National Fascist Party to ruling status in 1922 marked the culmination of years of national political turmoil and cultural upheaval. From its unification in 1870 until the close of World War I, Italy endured a series of national calamities that left the Apennine peninsula politically divided. The unification of 1870 itself signified little more than a political reorganization of Italy.

In *Fascism: A History*, historian Robert Eatwell describes how, despite achieving national unification, Italy remained socially fractured between the industrial north and the agrarian south.²⁸ Eatwell writes,

Loyalty was to the family rather than to an extended political community. [...] Politics in Italy during the late nineteenth century was, therefore, essentially a clique-based game, which owed as much to interest as to ideology. Certainly politics was closely connected

²⁶ Ibid, 218.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Eatwell, Roger. *Fascism: A History*. New York, NY: Penguin, 1995. p. 32.

to economic power, for major agricultural and industrial lobbies emerged which looked to the government to secure their interests.²⁹

The fledgling parliamentary system of newly unified Italy resembled an exchange between regional monied interests and national public servants, the former offering financial gifts to the latter with the expectation of reciprocity in the form of political favors. “Predictably,” Eatwell notes, “most citizens responded by seeing the state as the enemy, occupied by a parasitical and isolated ‘political class.’”³⁰ During the turn of the twentieth century, Italian political and cultural identity was largely a matter of regional or municipal politics. As in centuries prior, Italians conceived of themselves primarily as Venetian, Florentine, or Neapolitan.

Attempts by the Italian government to create a more cohesive Italian identity through colonial glory proved self-defeating. Military incursions in Ethiopia in 1896 resulted in “humiliating defeat” before a supposedly inferior culture.³¹ World War I only deepened the political rift between Italians and national political institutions such as the Italian parliament.

As a member of the Entente Powers, Italy emerged from World War I nominally victorious.³² However, Italian victory was merely pyrrhic. The calamitous economic and human costs of war left the corrupt Italian parliamentary government in disarray and deepened existing social fissures³³ Bureaucratic inefficiencies within the Italian army led to high casualty rates, a disproportionate number of which were sustained by Southern units. At the close of World War

²⁹ Ibid, 33.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid, 34.

³² Originally a member of the Triple Alliance, Italy withdrew from its pact with Germany and Austria-Hungary and joined the Entente Powers in 1915. By joining forces with France, Great Britain, and Russia, Italian leaders hoped to gain territorial possessions in southern Austria-Hungary following an Entente victory.

³³ Ibid, 36.

I, Italian citizens' resentment toward the national political class was matched only by their disenchantment concerning the officer corps of the Italian Royal Army.

The situation in post-war Italy inspired Gramsci's later conception of the crisis of authority. War brought nationwide anti-establishment feeling to a critical mass, and citizens began clamoring for fundamental reform of the Italian parliamentary system. Meanwhile, the Italian parliament appeared helpless to reorganize itself or execute any agenda which might effect meaningful change. Together, the regionalist character of Italian politics and the political turmoil of World War I rendered the Italian state impotent. Neither the conservative forces of Italian monarchism nor the progressive communist factions could muster the political capital or legitimacy necessary to establish a viable hegemonic regime.

Reflecting on the nature of hegemonic crisis in general and the post-World War I Italian crisis of authority in particular, Gramsci writes, "At a certain point in their historical lives, social groups become detached from their traditional parties."³⁴ This political alienation occurs when, "an appropriate political initiative is [...] necessary to liberate the economic thrust from the dead weight of traditional policies."³⁵ The fomentation of such a political initiative, Gramsci reasoned, "means that no group, neither the conservatives nor the progressives, has the strength for victory."³⁶ Consequently, any upstart political movement that rises to replace an ailing established order must as a matter of course fill its ranks with defectors from both the progressive and conservative factions of the old order. Former political adversaries, "either through a series of compromises or by force of arms," emerge from the rubble of the old order

³⁴ Antonio Gramsci, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916-1935*, Edited by David Forgacs. (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2000), 217-218.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 220.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 219.

under the standard of, “a new organism.”³⁷ The result is an ideological movement which is neither left nor right in its doctrine, but a revolutionary synthesis of both political traditions.

Rebirth Realized: The Rise and Rule of Benito Mussolini

Gramsci believed that political movements seeking to dethrone failing hegemonic orders require leadership in the form of, “charismatic ‘men of destiny.’”³⁸ Distinguished by bellicosity, populist revolutionary sentiments, authoritarian tendencies, and animosity toward the elite-classes of the old order, Gramsci’s men of destiny personify the political turmoil from which they rise. Gramsci notes that such a leader can champion regressive as well as progressive factions, using either the language of renascence or the language of Marxist revolution, respectively.³⁹ As the Italian experiment with parliamentary democracy disintegrated, and with it the old conservative and progressive factions, Gramsci’s third alternative emerged in the form of Fascism, embodied in Benito Mussolini, Italy’s man of destiny.

A bombastic rhetorician preaching a gospel of national glory and strength via cultural rebirth, Mussolini resembled a populist dictator leader in the regressive Gramscian sense. Known as *il Duce*, literally Italian for “the leader,” Mussolini stressed the importance of national mythology in Fascist doctrine. The cultural glory of Ancient Rome as well as the Roman legacy of military conquest were constant themes and allusions in Mussolini’s fervid orations and Fascist propaganda. Indeed, the National Fascist Party derived its namesake and official symbol

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid, 218.

³⁹ Ibid, 270.

from the *fascies*, a battleaxe protruding from a bundle of rods, which served as a symbol of imperial authority in Ancient Rome.⁴⁰

Under the standard of the *fascies*, Mussolini won legitimacy with syncretic appeals to a disheartened Italian people, who felt a cultural and political rootlessness. The Fascist emphasis on national community, dignity, and discipline appealed especially to Italy's emasculated World War I veterans. Linz observes how the Fascist militaristic ethos provided,

a link with the recent military experience of the generation and offered the younger ones the vicarious experience of being in uniform that their age had not allowed them to satisfy during World War I. The [Fascist] style of political activity, the marches the rallies, the songs, the burials of dead comrades, the salute, represented something essentially different from the style of political activity of their parents[.]⁴¹

Surrounded by political violence and instability, many Italian civilians likewise looked favorably upon the Fascist cause. For sympathizers, the spartan regimen of the National Fascist Party seemed to be Italy's only hope for national stability and order.⁴²

In his early years as leader of the National Fascist Party, Mussolini secured power for the Fascists by advocating a political program that appealed to both progressive and conservative partisans. On the left, Mussolini promised to abolish the monarchy, nationalize the arms industry, impose a special tax on war profiteers, enforce an eight-hour working day with a minimum wage, institute worker participation in industry, disband the nonelected Senate, and grant women the franchise.⁴³ Courting the right, he promised military strength, the recovery of Italian regions in the north not recaptured during World War I, as well as the establishment of

⁴⁰ Roger Eatwell, *Fascism: A History*, New York: Penguin Books, 1997, p. 43.

⁴¹ Juan J. Linz, *Fascism, A Reader's Guide: Analyses, Interpretations, Bibliography*, Edited by Walter Laqueur. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1976. p. 35.

⁴² Roger Eatwell, *Fascism: A History*, New York: Penguin Books, 1997, p. 56

⁴³ *Ibid*, 45.

Italy as a colonial power. As the Fascists consolidated power, Mussolini provided further appeasement to the political right by conceding support of the monarchy and the church. By the dawn of the 1920s, the Fascist Party counted among its ranks veterans, rural peasants, as well as members of the urban corporate and working-classes.

Mussolini maintained cohesion among the unorthodox Fascist coalition through a strategic use of national mythology, which the National Fascist Party disseminated as propaganda in speeches, broadcasts, essays, and other forms of popular media. Addressing the Fascist Congress at Naples in 1922, just three days before the Fascists seized control of Italy in their historic March on Rome, Mussolini resolved, “Our myth is the nation, our greatness is the greatness of the nation! And to this myth, this greatness, which we want to translate into a total reality, we subordinate everything else.”⁴⁴ Mussolini argued that nation-states derive greatness not from sheer geographic size but from the patriotic spirit of their citizens. “The Roman Empire,” he declared, “is the creation of the spirit, since the weapons were aimed, not just by the arms of Roman legionaries, but by their spirit. Now, therefore, we desire the greatness of the nation, both material and spiritual.”⁴⁵ This valorization of a mystical patriotic ethos capable of transcending time and caste, linking a nation’s ancient patriarchs with their latter-day standard-bearers, constitutes an essential component of fascist ideology.

But Mussolini’s use of national mythology demonstrates more than the centrality of anti-rationalism and populism in Fascist doctrine. Indeed, Italian mythology provided Mussolini with a valuable means of promoting other core Fascist principles, such as militarism and racism. In his public writings and speeches, Mussolini cultivated the idea of an Italian “Fatherland,” the

⁴⁴ Roger Griffin, *Fascism*. Oxford Readers, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 44.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

defense of which required the Italian people to, “have a powerful and respected Army, a proper Navy, an Air Force with air superiority, an intense spirit of discipline and sacrifice in every class of people.”⁴⁶ Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 represents the greatest manifestation of Mussolini’s imperial ambitions. Fascist propaganda outlets justified war with Ethiopia as both a realization of Italy’s national destiny as a colonial power and a necessary exercise in national physical, mental, and spiritual renewal.⁴⁷

Unlike the dismal failure of Italy’s 1896 foray into Ethiopia, the invasion of 1935 ended in decisive victory, reaffirming the Fascist narrative of Italian cultural superiority and, by implicit connection, racial superiority. Although Mussolini did not discuss race in extensive detail during the early years of the Fascist movement, the Italian conquest of Ethiopia provided an opportunity for what Roger Eatwell calls, “a second revolution,” a concerted effort by the Fascist Party to promote the racial and cultural supremacy of the Italian people.⁴⁸ As Fascist imperialist ambitions turned towards colonialism, Fascist propaganda increasingly advanced a view of the Italian people as belonging to a separate and superior lineage from that of all other Mediterranean peoples, namely Jews.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the failure of the League of Nations to protect Ethiopia, an independent Christian nation, from the Fascist onslaught helped confirm the Fascist narrative of national triumph over the feeble institutions of liberal democracy and globalism.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Ibid, 57.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 76.

⁴⁸ Roger Eatwell, *Fascism: A History*, New York: Penguin Books, 1997, p. 86.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 80-81.

⁵⁰ Wemlinger, Cherri. "Collective Security and the Italo-Ethiopian Dispute Before the League of Nations." *Peace & Change* 40, no. 2 (April 2015): 139-166. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 10, 2016). p. 22.

Winners, Losers, and the Failure of Politics as Usual

The American political landscape of 2015 resembled that of Italy a century prior in a few significant respects. Economic and cultural malaise gripped both nations. Entering the 2010s, many Americans felt fatigue from a decade's worth of costly wars and economic instability. Making matters worse, the election of President Barack Obama in 2008 heralded a period of intense political gridlock as conservative legislators executed a strategy of near absolute political obstructionism. In his 2009 book *Empire of Illusion*, Pulitzer-Prize winning journalist Chris Hedges interviews the late political theorist Sheldon Wolin. Discussing the future of American politics, Wolin exhibited a haunting degree of clairvoyance, stating,

My greatest fear is that the Obama administration will achieve relatively little in terms of structural change. They may at best keep the system going. But there is a growing pessimism. Every day we hear how much longer the recession will continue. They are already talking about beyond next year [into 2011]. The economic difficulties are more profound than we had guessed and because of globalization more difficult to deal with. I wish the political establishment, the parties, and leadership, would become more aware of the depths of the problem. They can't keep throwing money at this. They have to begin structural changes that involve a very different approach from a market economy. I don't think this will happen.⁵¹

In November of 2014, congressional approval ratings plummeted to single digit figures, corroborating Wolin's appraisal and revealing a historic rift between voters and their elected representatives.⁵²

More pertinent to an analysis of fascism, globalization and an increased political and cultural presence of Americans not descended from Europeans fostered cynicism and

⁵¹ Hedges, Chris. *Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle*. New York: Nation Books, 2009. p. 150.

⁵² Gallup, Inc. "Congress and the Public." Gallup.com. 2016. Accessed October 28, 2016. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1600/Congress-Public.aspx>.

nationalism within certain social strata, particularly white working-class Americans.⁵³ Illegal immigration and Islamic extremism became hotly debated issues in American political discourse, and race relations gained renewed relevance in the 2010s following a string of highly publicised police shootings in which white officers killed unarmed black suspects. These specific issues emerged as part of a broader national conversation about the effects of globalism and multiculturalism on American industry and culture. Exploring the role of deindustrialized American communities in the 2016 election, professor Sherry Linkon assesses the plight of the white working-class, writing,

They see themselves as losers, as people who, for reasons they can't always articulate, somehow deserve nothing more than a low-wage, insecure job and persistent economic vulnerability. And for some, as we've seen in so much election coverage, the displacement of deindustrialization is now surfacing in the form of anger and resentment – of politicians, of immigrants, of those who seem to be thriving in the contemporary economy.⁵⁴

Indeed, the outsourcing of American jobs to developing nations overseas and the growing presence of immigrants in the domestic workforce engendered a sense of national rootlessness within formerly industrial white communities.⁵⁵

In the years immediately preceding the 2016 general election, many white working-class Americans saw their nation rapidly towards globalizing while they, the country's backbone and hitherto hegemonic class, were left behind as economic and cultural deadweight. At the same time, established institutions, such as corporations, unions, government and even churches

⁵³ Seltzer, Leon F. "Outrage Meets Outrageousness: The Populist Logic Behind Trump's Surprising Popularity." *Journal Of Psychohistory* 44, no. 1 (Summer 2016): 73-84. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 4, 2016).

⁵⁴ Linkon, Sherry. "The Half-Life of Deindustrialization: Why Donald Trump Is Just A Symptom." www.BillMoyers.com. August 18, 2016. Accessed November 04, 2016.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

appeared powerless to help American's deindustrialized communities.⁵⁶ In the midst of this historic upheaval, the American tradition of liberal democracy, like its Italian counterpart a century earlier, experienced its own crisis of cultural hegemony. In his 2009 interview, Wolin offered a grim prognostication, warning,

anti-politicalness, even anti-politicalness, will be very powerful elements in taking us towards a radically dictatorial direction. It testifies to how thin the commitment to democracy is in the present circumstances. Democracy is not ascendant. It is not dominant. It is beleaguered. The extent to which [...] people have been drawn away from public concerns [...] makes it very likely they could then rally to a demagogue.⁵⁷

Wolin never lived to see his auguries confirmed. He passed away in October of 2015, on the eve of the 2016 election season. Had he lived to witness the 2016 election, he would have seen the rise of another charismatic man of destiny, who found power as a champion of an irate populism directed toward the ineffectual two-party American political establishment.⁵⁸

Making America Great Again

Outwardly, Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again" campaign carries a self-evident kinship with Benito Mussolini's call for palingenesis, the cultural and political rebirth of the Italian nation. Yet, Trump's 2016 crusade against the American political establishment in defense of national tradition does not necessarily constitute evidence of Fascism. While both Mussolini and Trump positioned themselves in opposition to the political status quos of their respective times, their movements appeared in fundamentally different ways.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Chris Hedges. *Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle*. New York: Nation Books, 2009. p. 150.

⁵⁸ Riley, Dylan, and George Souvlis. "Fascism and Democracy." www.JacobinMag.com. August 19, 2016. Accessed October 28, 2016. <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/08/trump-clinton-fascism-authoritarian-democracy/>.

On the one hand, Mussolini's National Fascist Party represented an external threat to the Italian political establishment. On the other, Trump's candidacy constituted an insurgency from within a hegemonic political institution, namely the Republican Party. Furthermore, Donald Trump's anti-establishmentism combined with his ostensible reverence for national tradition does not in itself equate to fascism. A movement guided by these principles might rightly be regarded as merely conservative or nationalist. Yet, despite these differences, striking similarities exist between the political platforms of both leaders in terms of their ideological syncretism, style, and beliefs concerning violence as a political tool.

An appropriate starting point for a comparison between Mussolini and Trump is the mutual syncretism of their political agendas and the role of authoritarianism in their respective campaigns. Although Trump sought the presidency on the Republican ticket, his platform was far from grounded in conservative orthodoxy. Like Mussolini, Trump promoted his movement as non-partisan, calling called for disgruntled members of the American political left and right to unite under his leadership.

Courting disaffected members of the left-leaning Democratic Party, Trump advocated non-interventionism the Middle East. He contrasted his position with the more hawkish record of Hillary Clinton, who had both voted as a senator for the 2003 invasion of Iraq and, as Secretary of State, championed the United States' failed 2011 military intervention in Libya. Trump further distinguished himself from Clinton by opposing American military forays abroad and criticizing multi-national defense pacts such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Rucker, Philip, and Robert Costa. "Trump Questions Need for NATO, Outlines Noninterventionist Foreign Policy." *Www.WashingtonPost.com*. March 21, 2016. Accessed November 04, 2016. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2016/03/21/donald-trump-reveals-foreign-policy-team-in-meeting-with-the-washington-post/>.

Following in the footsteps of democratic socialist Bernie Sanders, whose candidacy represented the progressive far left in the 2016 election, Trump promised to enact campaign finance reform.⁶⁰ Trump also included paid family leave for workers, a key liberal policy position, as part of his presidential agenda.⁶¹

To conservative Americans, Trump offered what Benito Mussolini had offered the Italian proletariat: the restoration of national military strength and civil law and order. Addressing the 2016 Republican National Convention following his nomination, Trump firmly resolved, "In this race for the White House, I am the Law And Order candidate."⁶² Describing the decline of the nation as well as the promise of his candidacy, Trump stated,

Americans watching this address tonight have seen the recent images of violence in our streets and the chaos in our communities. Many have witnessed this violence personally, some have even been its victims. I have a message for all of you: the crime and violence that today afflicts our nation will soon come to an end. Beginning on January 20th 2017, safety will be restored.⁶³

This excerpt amalgamates central tenets of fascism, including populism and national rebirth, into a treatment of another quintessential fascist concern: the restoring of national cohesion through cultivation of the police state. Like Mussolini, Trump styled himself as a man of action with a disdain for dialogue and diplomacy. Both men declared that liberal democracy had delivered the nation into the hands of corrupt agents, who could be dispatched only with force. Such retaliation required a singular leader to organize and lead the opposition.

⁶⁰ Wofford, Ben, By J.M. Berger, By James Higdon, and By Julie Sedivy. "Meet the Liberals Who Think Trump's Good for Democracy." [www.Politico.com](http://www.politico.com). August 25, 2015. Accessed October 28, 2016. <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/08/meet-the-liberals-who-love-trump-121733>.

⁶¹ Gass, Nick. "Trump Rolls Out Paid Family Leave Plan." [www.Politico.com](http://www.politico.com). September 13, 2016. Accessed October 28, 2016. <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/09/trump-paid-family-leave-plan-228087>.

⁶² Politico Staff. "Full Text: Donald Trump 2016 RNC Draft Speech Transcript." www.Politico.com. July 21, 2016. Accessed November 09, 2016.

⁶³ Ibid.

When discussing national challenges, American presidents have traditionally appealed to God or the good faith of the electorate, stressing the importance of teamwork, dialogue, and community. Breaking with centuries of custom, Trump made no such overtures in his nomination address. “I am your voice,” Trump resolved, adding soon thereafter, “Nobody knows the system better than me, which is why I alone can fix it.”⁶⁴ Underlying both the Fascism of Italy and Donald Trump’s populist appeals is the expectation that citizens confer unprecedented power to a national savior, whose strength and charisma would pull the nation violently from the brink of crisis.

Trump’s immigration plan, the flagship of his presidential platform, distilled nativism and authoritarianism into a populist cocktail reminiscent of Mussolini’s Fascism. In the 1920s, Mussolini promised that Italian conquests of North Africa would evict undesirable or inferior groups and result in *spazio vitale*, literally “living space,” for native Italians.⁶⁵ Comparably, Trump’s promise to deport eleven million undocumented immigrants from the United States signified an attempt to uproot vulnerable, non-white communities as a means of realizing national strength and cohesion. Implicit in Trump’s commitment to deport America’s undocumented laborers is an avowal of militarism, violence, and racism that harkens back to Italy’s 1935 Ethiopian incursion.

In his 2016 article “Outrage Meets Outrageousness: The Populist Logic Behind Trump's Surprising Popularity,” historical psychologist Leon Seltzer considers Trump’s campaign in general, and his immigration platform in particular, as a response to widespread alienation within the American electorate. Seltzer examines the white working-class perception of immigrants as,

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Antonsich, Marco. "Geopolitica: The 'Geographical and Imperial Consciousness' of Fascist Italy." *Geopolitics* 14, no. 2 (Summer 2009): 256-277. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 9, 2016).

all too-willing to work for low wages, therefore, either robbing [the white working-class] of their jobs or driving down their earnings—making it impossible for them to get ahead, or even remain in the middle class. Additionally, they attribute most of the violence in the nation to those who simply ‘have no business’ living side by side with them.⁶⁶

Central to both leaders’ policies is the notion of reconstructing the ethnic makeup of a certain region for the benefit of a traditionally hegemonic, albeit recently diminished, class.

Furthermore, Trump’s famous border wall, which he pledged to erect along the Mexican border, reveals a latent conception of the state as an organism. For Trump and his supporters, such a wall would serve both symbolically and literally as a kind of shield against external cultural contagions.

The issue of international trade raises another instance in which Trump fascistically merged an organic conception of the state with aggressive populism and anti-globalism. In contrast to liberalism, with its idealized notions of free trade and economic reciprocity, Trump espoused a more cynical view of international commerce; in order for one nation to profit via trade, another must suffer. This notion of trade as a zero-sum game is nowhere more evident than in Trump’s first speech as a presidential candidate, in which he lamented, “We don't have victories anymore. We used to have victories, but we don't have them. When was the last time anybody saw us beating, let's say, China in a trade deal? They kill us. I beat China all the time. All the time.”⁶⁷ Much as Mussolini blamed the economic turmoil of post-war Italy on the ineptitudes of a corrupt political elite, Trump attributed American economic malaise as, “the consequence of a leadership class that worships globalism over Americanism.”⁶⁸ Trump

⁶⁶ Leon F. Seltzer, "Outrage Meets Outrageousness: The Populist Logic Behind Trump's Surprising Popularity," *Journal Of Psychohistory* 44, no. 1 (Summer 2016): 73-84. p. 74.

⁶⁷ "Full Text: Donald Trump Announces a Presidential Bid," Washington Post, June 16, 2015.

⁶⁸ Politico Staff. "Full Transcript: Donald Trump's Jobs Plan Speech." [Www.Politico.com](http://www.politico.com). June 28, 2016. Accessed November 08, 2016. <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/06/full-transcript-trump-job-plan-speech-224891>.

implored Americans to consider the examples of other nations, such as Great Britain, where anti-globalist factions had recently, “voted to take back control of their economy, politics and borders,” by winning a referendum to leave the European Union.⁶⁹

Just as Mussolini promised dignity and power to emasculated World War I veterans, Donald Trump’s message resonated especially with American veterans, many of whom rejected establishment military leadership in the wake of several indecisive wars and bureaucratic scandals.⁷⁰ Speaking to the American Legion on the 77th anniversary of the start of World War II, Trump mixed gratitude with ideology, praising those who, “advance the cause of Americanism – not Globalism.”⁷¹ Under his presidential administration, Trump pledged, “[America] will be united by our common culture, values and principles – becoming One American Nation.”⁷² Trump’s subsequent call to, “rebuild our depleted military, and pursue a state-of-the-art missile defense” carries latent echoes of Mussolini’s promise to modernize the Italian military in the interwar period.⁷³

Similarly, Trump made the issue of gun ownership a top campaign issue, thereby exploiting the vulnerable masculinity of the civilian white male. For many white male voters, the national debate over gun control epitomized a broader struggle for cultural hegemony, one which pitted the Constitutional textualism of the white male voter against the tyranny of the soon-to-be non-white majority. Seltzer notes that gun ownership symbolized for white men a way of

⁶⁹ Trump’s fascistic tendency to express his nativism and authoritarianism via solidarity with controversial right-wing international leaders and movements will receive further discussion later in this paper. Indeed, this topic merits a thesis of its own.

⁷⁰ Neidig, Harper. "Poll: Trump Leads Clinton among Military Voters, Veterans." *The Hill*. September 07, 2016. Accessed October 28, 2016.

⁷¹ Politico Staff. "Full Text: Donald Trump's Speech to the American Legion." *Www.politico.org*. September 1, 2016. Accessed October 28, 2016.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

maintaining, “some masculine standing in a world they experience as increasingly emasculating.”⁷⁴ Promising to protect Second Amendment rights from a perceived left-wing plot to ban private firearm ownership, Trump effectively made himself the de facto protector of an endangered, once hegemonic cultural identity.

The Fascist Modus Operandi

The notion of politics as theater proved integral in the upstart political programs of both Mussolini and Trump. The language of tradition, action, and mythology effectively roused working-class support behind the Fascist cause as well as Donald Trump’s candidacy.⁷⁵ In *The Anatomy of Fascism*, Robert Paxton notes how blooming fascist movements combine populism and propaganda in rallying support within their respective nations. The fascist modus operandi, Paxton writes, “exploit[s] the victims of rapid industrialisation and globalisation-modernisation's losers, using, to be sure, the most modern styles and techniques of propaganda.”⁷⁶ Mussolini left a career as a journalist to enter politics and understood the importance of drama and mass communication in politics. As leader of the Fascists, he used the radio, a novel form of popular media in his time, to disseminate Fascist propaganda. Quoting Doug Thompson, author of *State Control in Fascist Italy: Culture and Conformity, 1925-43*, British historian Piers Brendon

⁷⁴ Leon F. Seltzer, "Outrage Meets Outrageousness: The Populist Logic Behind Trump's Surprising Popularity," *Journal Of Psychohistory* 44, no. 1 (Summer 2016): 73-84.

⁷⁵ The fascist subordination of positivist social reality to popular mythos merits a deliberate analysis of its own. Both Mussolini and Trump held a tenuous relationship with objective reality. Mussolini once said, “Our myth is the nation[.] [...] And to this myth, this greatness, which we want to translate into a total reality, we subordinate everything else.” Trump echoed this notion of myth as a determinant of reality throughout his campaign, most notably in his discredited claim that he had witnessed firsthand thousands of muslims cheering the fall of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001.

⁷⁶ Paxton, Robert O. *The Anatomy of Fascism*. New York: Knopf, 2004. p. 12.

describes Mussolini's mastery of media airwaves. "As more people acquired wireless sets," Brendon writes, "this 'magical instrument with its irresistible fascination became the official voice of the State, amplifying the sonority of the Duce's voice extending his charismatic relationship with the public.'" ⁷⁷ Analogously, Trump's pre-political career as a reality television star relied heavily on his skills as an effective communicator and showman.

Unlike previous presidential candidates, who relied on a staff of speechwriters and public relations specialists, the Trump campaign operated under a simple, centralized communication strategy with the candidate himself playing a major role in campaign media. As conservative pundit Fred Barnes wrote in June of 2016,

Ronald Reagan was a *National Review* conservative. George W. Bush was a *Weekly Standard* conservative. Mitt Romney was a *Wall Street Journal* conservative. Trump will be the first tabloid conservative—the *New York Post* or *Daily Mail*. It's more a blue-collar or working-class sensibility. ⁷⁸

Indeed, Trump's spontaneity and aggressive style of speech perfectly suited the sensationalism of the twenty-four hour news cycle, a novel form of mass media in the twenty-first century.

Trump personally maintained an active presence on social media platforms such as Facebook and, most notably, Twitter, directly engaging voters with his late night tweets and bombastic interview appearances. ⁷⁹

Relatively recent inventions, Twitter and the twenty-four hour news cycle both fulfill the same role in the fascist mission as the radio. By turning on a radio, logging into Twitter, or tuning into a modern news source, such as the Cable News Network, citizens subject themselves

⁷⁷ Brendon, Piers. *The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s*. New York: Knopf, 2000. 554.

⁷⁸ Barnes, Fred. "Trump's Intellectuals." *Www.WeeklyStandard.com*. June 06, 2016. Accessed November 08, 2016. <http://www.weeklystandard.com/trumps-intellectuals/article/2002580>.

⁷⁹ "Roundtable: Donald Trump's Media Tactics." *Weekend All Things Considered* (2016): *Literature Resource Center*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 8, 2016).

to an inundation of personalized propaganda that stems from the highest echelons of political authority. In the early 1930's, philosopher Walter Benjamin examined the cultural and political significance of the radio, writing,

One need only consider what it means that the radio listener as opposed to every other kind of audience, receives the programming in his home, where the voice is like a guest; upon arrival, it is usually assessed just as quickly and as sharply. And why is it that no one tells the voice what is expected of it, what will be appreciated, what will not be forgiven, etc.⁸⁰

As in the case of the radio during the 1920s and 30s, the contemporary rise of social media and non-stop news has placed consumers of media in intimate proximity of those who produce media, eliminating third party interlocutors. Just as Italians once experienced firsthand the fiery orations of *il Duce* with the simple turn of their radio dial, Trump supporters accessed the unadulterated musings of their chosen candidate, whose tweets often consisted of accusations and rumors regarding his rivals and critics.⁸¹ This politicization of personalized, round-the-clock media speaks to the totalitarian aspirations of fascism and reveals the significance of Gramsci's man of destiny, whose daily presence in national media embodies the authority of the state.

A final yet nonetheless critical point of comparison between Trump and Mussolini is the way in which both leaders engaged violently with opposing factions and regarded the free press with explicit hostility. Fascist authoritarianism makes the control of mass media an ideological imperative. Accordingly, fascism employs its signature style of aggressive populism as a means of suppressing non-fascist media outlets. Fascists seek to intimidate their opponents via threats, both implicit and explicit, and, in some cases, violence.

⁸⁰ Benjamin, Walter. *Radio Benjamin*. Edited by Lecia Rosenthal. Translated by Jonathan Lutes, Lisa H. Schumann, and Diana K. Reece. New York, NY: Verso, 2014. p. 364.

⁸¹ In a curious turn of events, Donald Trump retweeted a quote by Mussolini on February 28, 2016. When asked about the tweet, which read, "Better to live a day as a lion than 100 years as a sheep," Trump stated that he agreed with the quote regardless of its origins.

In the case of Mussolini, the Fascist *squadristi*, known colloquially as the Blackshirts, embodied the fascist fusion of violence with authoritarian, revolutionary politics. A militia in both structure and purpose, the Blackshirts roved the Italian countryside, assaulting anyone suspected of anti-fascist leanings.⁸² While there is no true contemporary American equivalent to Mussolini's Blackshirts, Donald Trump's supporters repeatedly demonstrated a willingness to engage in violence for the sake of their leader. Instances of Trump supporters assaulting anti-Trump protestors became a hallmark of the 2016 campaign season.⁸³ Trump often sanctioned such violence, stating in one instance that, "in the old days" protestors would "be carried out on stretchers." Invoking a revealing appeal to mythology, nostalgia, and violence, Trump asserted, "We're not allowed to punch back anymore."⁸⁴ True to fascist form, Trump portrayed his critics as weak, infirm, and deranged, contrasting himself as a paragon of strength and masculinity. The Trump campaign habitually revoked the press credentials of media outlets deemed unfriendly.⁸⁵ In November 2015, Trump mocked the congenital disabilities of Serge Kovalski, a New York Times reporter who had recently discredited Trump's claim that he had witnessed "thousands and thousands" of Muslims cheering during the collapse of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001.⁸⁶

⁸² Roger Eatwell, *Fascism: A History*, New York: Penguin Books, 1997, p. 54.

⁸³ Mathis-Lilley, Ben. "A Continually Growing List of Violent Incidents at Trump Events." www.slate.com. April 25, 2016. Accessed November 10, 2016.

⁸⁴ Deaton, Chris. "Protester Would Be 'Carried out on a Stretcher' in the Old Days, Trump Reminisces." *Weekly Standard*. February 23, 2016. Accessed November 10, 2016.

⁸⁵ Kludt, Tom, and Brian Stelter. "'The Blacklist': Here Are the Media Outlets Banned by Donald Trump." [Money.CNN.com](http://money.cnn.com). June 14, 2016. Accessed November 10, 2016.

⁸⁶ Alemany, Jacqueline. "The Election That Forgot America's Disabled." [www.CBSNews.com](http://www.cbsnews.com). November 4, 2016. Accessed November 10, 2016.

Conclusions and Decisions: 11/9/2016, 2:41 AM

Donald Trump's historic upset victory in the 2016 general election shocked establishment political institutions on both the left and the right, whose incompetence, Trump argued throughout his campaign, had made his candidacy necessary in the first place. Trump promised to succeed where the traditional hegemonic factions had failed by enforcing law and order and "drain[ing] the swamp" of ineptitude and cronyism that had taken hold of American politics.⁸⁷ Combining national mythology and an aggressive populism that belittled the feeble, the female, and the foreign while valorizing the strong, the male, and the native, he called for a national rebirth. He promised the rejuvenation of American military prestige and the return of law and order in a nation divided along racial and class lines. As a candidate, Trump regarded journalists and critics with a contempt that sometimes incited violence within the ranks of his supporters while simultaneously expressing sympathy for contemporary autocrats.⁸⁸

In the same way that Mussolini forged alliances with other fascist leaders, whose populist nativism, nationalism, and militarism mirrored that of the Fascist cause, Trump voiced unrepentant admiration for a broad array of international right-wing leaders. Such expressions of sympathy were often mild-mannered, as when Nigel Farage, leader of the nativist United Kingdom Independence Party, flew to Mississippi to campaign alongside Trump.⁸⁹ In other

⁸⁷ Kelly, John. "What's With All Trump's Talk About 'Draining the Swamp'?" www.slate.com. October 26, 2016. Accessed November 09, 2016.

⁸⁸ Additionally, Trump's repeated pledge to imprison his principal political opponent, Hillary Clinton, and his supporters' cries of "Lock her up!" resemble a kind of political intolerance with which Antonio Gramsci was personally familiar.

⁸⁹ Farage, Nigel. "Nigel Farage: Donald Trump Calls Himself 'Mr. Brexit.' Here's Why He's Right." www.washingtonpost.com. September 6, 2016. Accessed November 08, 2016.

cases, however, Trump made role models of autocrats, expressing veneration for the authoritarian style of leaders such as Russian president Vladimir Putin and North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un.⁹⁰

On their own, these various elements reveal nothing about Trump's ideological leanings. Communists and conservatives can be populist and militaristic. Classical liberals and monarchists can be nationalist. Anarchists and kings can ridicule the vulnerable while holding personal strength, discipline, and pride as the greatest of all human qualities. But the simultaneous presence of these particulars in a person can mean only one thing: that person is a fascist.

Needless to say, there are many differences between the fascism of Donald Trump and that of his ideological doppelganger, Benito Mussolini. Yet these differences exist only to the extent that both men inhabited separate realms in time and space. And, in this way, such differences are ultimately meaningless.

Manifestations of a syncretic ideology, fascist movements are like snowflakes: no two are alike. In his article "Ur-Fascism," linguist Umberto Eco aptly elucidates this point, highlighting the paradoxical nature of fascism. Eco compares fascism with Wittgenstein's notion of a game, writing, "A game can be either competitive or not, it can require some special skill or none, it can or cannot involve money. Games are different activities that display only some 'family resemblance.'"⁹¹ Analogously, fascist movements can materialize across time and space, each

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/09/06/nigel Farage-donald-trump-calls-himself-mr-brexit-heres-why-hes-right/>.

⁹⁰ Coleburn, Christina. "Donald Trump's History of Praising Dictators." [Www.NBCNews.com](http://www.nbcnews.com). July 6, 2016. Accessed November 08, 2016.

⁹¹ Eco, Umberto. "Ur-Fascism." [Www.NYBooks.com](http://www.nybooks.com). June 22, 1995. Accessed November 09, 2016. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1995/06/22/ur-fascism/>.

within its own discrete national crisis. In this way, one fascist movement may appear unrelated or even non-fascist when compared to another. Yet, Eco notes, a kind of “Eternal Fascism” does exist. This quintessential fascism,

derives from individual or social frustration. That is why one of the most typical features of the historical fascism was the *appeal to a frustrated middle class*, a class suffering from an economic crisis or feelings of political humiliation, and frightened by the pressure of lower social groups.⁹²

This frustration brought critical numbers of white working-class voters into the Trump voting coalition. Without the support of disenchanted, nervous, and emasculated white male workers, Trump never would have carried primary season, let alone election night.⁹³

Trump’s message of national security via mass deportation, military expansion, and an end to free globalized commerce formed a classically fascist overture. Like Mussolini, Trump assured the disaffected, previously hegemonic caste that, “their only privilege is the most common one, to be born in the same country.”⁹⁴ During the height of his campaign, Trump used “America First” as a major campaign slogan, one with obvious appeal for alienated white voters. Tellingly, America First was the, “the isolationist, defeatist, anti-Semitic national organization that urged the United States to appease Adolf Hitler.”⁹⁵ But Donald Trump is not Adolf Hitler. Nor is he Mussolini, Franco, or any other historical fascist despot. Yet, in accordance with the unique political and cultural nuances of his time, Trump is indeed a fascist.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Cohn, Nate. "Why Trump Won: Working-Class Whites." *Www.NYTimes.com*. November 9, 2016. Accessed November 9, 2016.

⁹⁴ Umberto Eco, "Ur-Fascism," *Www.NYBooks.com*, June 22, 1995.

⁹⁵ Dunn, Susan. "Trump's 'America First' Carries Ugly Echo." *CNN*. April 28, 2016. Accessed November 09, 2016. <http://www.cnn.com/2016/04/27/opinions/trump-america-first-ugly-echoes-dunn/index.html>.

The product of Gramscian hegemonic crisis, Trump's democratic victory is — like that of all upstart fascist leaders — symptomatic of a greater cultural malady. To this end, Americans of every class should solemnly weigh the implications of Trump's victory. Americans must ask themselves what it means that a rarefied reality television star and renowned real estate huckster has won their nation's highest office. The answer to this question lies within living memory, and one need only travel through the ossuaries of twentieth-century battlefields and politics to find it.

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