

Fascism: the view from the USA in 1945

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In this morning's [Letter from an American](#), Heather Cox Richardson said:

Beginning in 1943, the War Department published a series of pamphlets for U.S. Army personnel in the European theater of World War II. Titled Army Talks, the series was designed "to help [the personnel] become better-informed men and women and therefore better soldiers."

On March 24, 1945, the topic for the week was "FASCISM!"

Heather was right to draw attention to this, but it was not the first time she had done so. She also did so in May 2023, [when I wrote the response](#) I share again below.

It's important to note why I wrote in the way I did then. "Woke" was then the favourite term of abuse for the far-right Trump supporter, and being "anti-woke" was how they defined themselves, but as I argued then and will still argue now, "anti-woke" was code for being fascist, which is what they were then, and now.

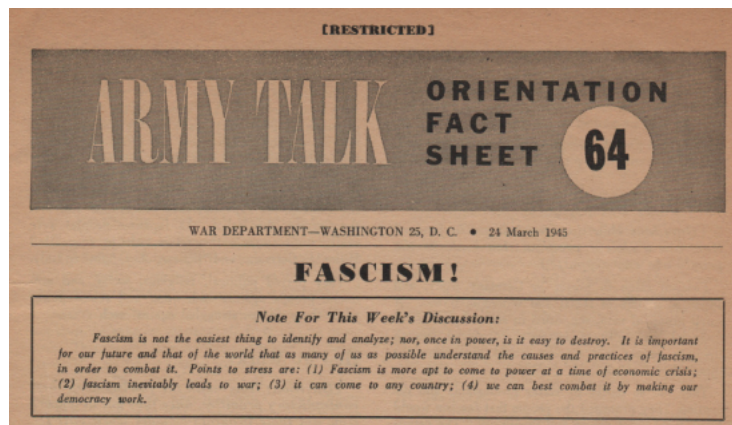
And let's be clear what being woke means. [It can be defined](#) as being "aware of and actively attentive to important societal facts and issues (especially issues of racial and social justice)." If you are woke, then you are not only aware of injustice but also want to address it.

So what are you if you are anti-woke and so oppose "important societal facts and issues (especially issues of racial and social justice)"? First, you are a proponent of injustice. Second, you support a society that is based on prejudice, othering, and hatred of the person you define as having that characteristic. That is what the fascist does. This is what being "anti-woke" means.

And that's why being woke is important: those who are woke oppose what fascists do, but they do not just oppose them; they seek to remedy the harm fascists cause in society. The term still has value, as does the clear line it helps us draw.

The US Army knew that anti-wokeism was fascism in 1945. Why don't we acknowledge it now?

I am grateful to [today's edition](#) of Heather Cox Richardson's 'Letter from an American' for pointing my attention to an extraordinary publication from the US Army in March 1945. [It looked like this:](#)



That is some introduction.

What followed were five pages of discussion on the dangers of [fascism](#), intended to inform US troops on the attitudes that they might meet in Germany, which they were close to part-occupying by then.

Some of the highlights are:

Fascism is a way to run a country—it's the way Italy was run, and the way Germany and Japan are run. Fascism is the precise opposite of democracy. The people run democratic governments, but fascist governments run the people.

Fascism is government by the few and for the few. The objective is seizure and control of the economic, political, social, and cultural life of the state. Why? The democratic way of life interferes with their methods and desires for: (1) conducting business; (2) living with their fellow-men; (3) having the final say in matters concerning others, as well as themselves. The basic principles of democracy stand in the way of their desires; hence—democracy must go! Anyone who is not a member of their inner gang has to do what he's told. They permit no civil liberties, no equality before the law. They make their own rules and change them when they choose. If you don't like it, it's "T.S."

And this:

How It Starts

(Question: How does fascism get in power? How can a violent program that enslaves the people win any support?)

Fascism came to power in Germany, Italy, and Japan at a time of social and economic unrest. A small group of men, supported in secret by powerful financial and military interests, convinced enough insecure people that fascism would give them the things they wanted.

The fascists promised everything to everyone: They would make the poor rich and the rich richer. To the farmers, the fascists promised land through elimination of large estates. To the workers they promised elimination of unemployment—jobs for all at high wages. To the small business men they promised more customers and profits through the elimination of large business enterprises. To big business men and the industrialists they secretly promised greater security and profits through the elimination of small business competitors and trade unions and the crushing of socialists and communists. To the whole nation they promised glory and wealth by conquest. They asserted it was their right, as a “superior people,” to rule the world.

The fascists knew that all believers in democracy were their enemies. They knew that the fundamental principle of democracy—faith in the common sense of the common people—was the direct opposite of the fascist principle of rule by the elite few. So they fought democracy in all its phases. At the same time that they proclaimed the “superiority” of the Germans, the Italians, the Japanese, they proclaimed also that the German, the Italian, the Japanese peoples were really unfit to rule themselves. It became “Heil Hitler” in Germany, and “Believe, obey, fight” in Italy.

They played political, religious, social, and economic groups against each other and seized power while these groups struggled against each other.

Then they moved on:

How It Works

(Question: How could the fascists keep their contradictory promises, once they got in power? How did their program actually work out?)

It was easy enough for the fascists to promise all things to all people before they were in power. Once they were actually in power, they could not, of course, keep their contradictory promises. They had intended in advance to break some, and they did break those

The next section was:

Fascism = War?

(Question: If we leave fascist nations alone, will they leave us alone? Or does fascism inevitably lead to war?)

We have seen that the people of a fascist state earn less and less, and so are able to buy less and less of the goods they produce with their slave labor. This means that eventually the fascist leaders either have to abandon the system, or look abroad for new markets to dispose of the mounting surplus of goods that cannot be sold at home.

The fascists do not choose to abandon their system and give up their graft, and so they are forced to acquire foreign markets and to eliminate competing nations. Due to their slave labor, the fascists are able to undersell the free nations of the world. The free nations must either resort to fascism, so that with slave labor they can meet the cut-throat prices of the fascist nations, or they must erect trade barriers to keep out the ruthless fascist competition. (See Douglas Miller: *You Can't Do Business With Hitler!*) In either case, the fascist nation still wants the markets, and it goes after them with the same methods used in domestic affairs—intimidation, terror, and force. In foreign affairs, force means war.

There are reams of thought that flow from that, and the current oppression of wages in the UK.

The paper moved on to:

Can It Happen Here?

Some Americans would give an emphatic “No” to the question “Can fascism come to America after it has been defeated abroad?” They would say that Americans are too smart, that they are sold on the democratic way of life, that they wouldn’t permit any group to put fascism over in America. Fascism, some might say, is something peculiar that you find only among people who like swastikas, who like to listen to speeches from balconies in Rome, or who like to think that their emperor is god. Their reaction might be that it is something “foreign” that Americans would recognize in a minute, like the goose-step. They

might feel that we’d laugh it out of existence in a hurry.

(Question: Do all fascists come from Germany, Japan, or Italy?)

Page 4/7

In a good many European nations, the people felt the same way some of us do: that fascism was foreign to them and could never become a power in their land.

This is particularly telling:

Whenever free governments anywhere fail to solve their basic economic and social problems, there is always the danger that a native brand of fascism will arise to exploit the situation and the people.

I have included most of the next section; it resonates so much:

Can We Spot It?

(Question: How can we identify native American fascists at work?)

An American fascist seeking power would not proclaim that he is a fascist. Fascism always camouflages its plans and purposes. Hitler made demagogic appeals to all groups and swore: "Neither I nor anybody in the National Socialist Party advocates proceeding by anything but Constitutional methods."

Any fascist attempt to gain power in America would not use the exact Hitler pattern. It would work under the guise of "super-patriotism" and "super-Americanism." Fascist leaders are neither stupid nor naive. They know that they must hand out a line that "sells." Huey Long is said to have remarked that if fascism came to America, it would be on a program of "Americanism."

Fascists in America may differ slightly from fascists in other countries, but there are a number of attitudes and practices that they have in common. Following are three. Every person who has one of them is not necessarily a fascist. But he is in a mental state that lends itself to the acceptance of fascist aims.

1. Pitting of religious, racial, and economic groups against one another in order to break down national unity is a device of the "divide and conquer" technique used by Hitler to gain power in Germany and in other countries. With slight variations, to suit local conditions, fascists everywhere have used this Hitler method. In many countries, anti-Semitism (hatred of Jews) is a dominant device of fascism. In the United States, native fascists have often been anti-Catholic, anti-Jew, anti-Negro, anti-Labor, anti-foreign-born. In South America, the native fascists use the same scapegoats except that they substitute anti-Protestantism for anti-Catholicism.

Interwoven with the "master race" theory of fascism is a well-planned "hate campaign" against minority races, religions, and other groups. To suit their particular needs and aims, fascists will use any one or a combination of such groups as a convenient scapegoat.

2. Fascism cannot tolerate such religious and ethi-

And so the paper moved to its conclusion:

How To Stop It

(Question: How can we prevent fascism from developing in the United States?)

The only way to prevent fascism from getting a hold in America is by making our democracy work and by actively cooperating to preserve world peace and security.

In support, the paper says:

Lots of things can happen inside of people when they are unemployed or hungry. They become frightened, angry, desperate, confused. Many, in their misery, seek to find somebody to blame. They look

for a scapegoat as a way out. Fascism is always ready to provide one. In its bid for power, it is ready to drive wedges that will disunite the people and weaken the nation. It supplies the scapegoat—Catholics, Jews, Negroes, labor unions, big business—any group upon which the insecure and unemployed can be brought to pin the blame for their misfortune.

We all know that many serious problems will face us when the War is over. If there is a period of economic stress it will create tensions among our people, including us as returning veterans. The resentment may be directed against minorities—especially if undemocratic organizations with power and money can direct our emotions and thinking along these lines.

The fascist doctrine of hate fulfills a triple mission. By creating disunity—it weakens democracy. By getting men to hate rather than to think—it prevents men from seeking the real cause and a democratic solution to the problem. By fake promises of jobs and security, fascism then tries to lure men to its program as the way out of insecurity. Only by democratically solving the economic problems of our day can there be any certainty that fascism won't happen here. That is our job as citizens.

Citizenship in a democracy is more than a ballot dropped in a box on Election Day. It's a 365-days-a-year job requiring the active participation and best judgment of every citizen in the affairs of his community, his nation, and his country's relations with the world.

Fascism thrives on indifference and ignorance. It makes headway when people are apathetic or cynical about their government—when they think of it as something far removed from them and beyond their personal concern. The erection of a traffic light on

I stress, this is a slightly edited version of the paper.

But what it says is one very clear thing.

Unless we are 'woke', we cannot beat fascism.

And 'anti-wokeism' is fascism.

The US Army did not use that term in 1945, but it might as well have.

We should use it now.

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