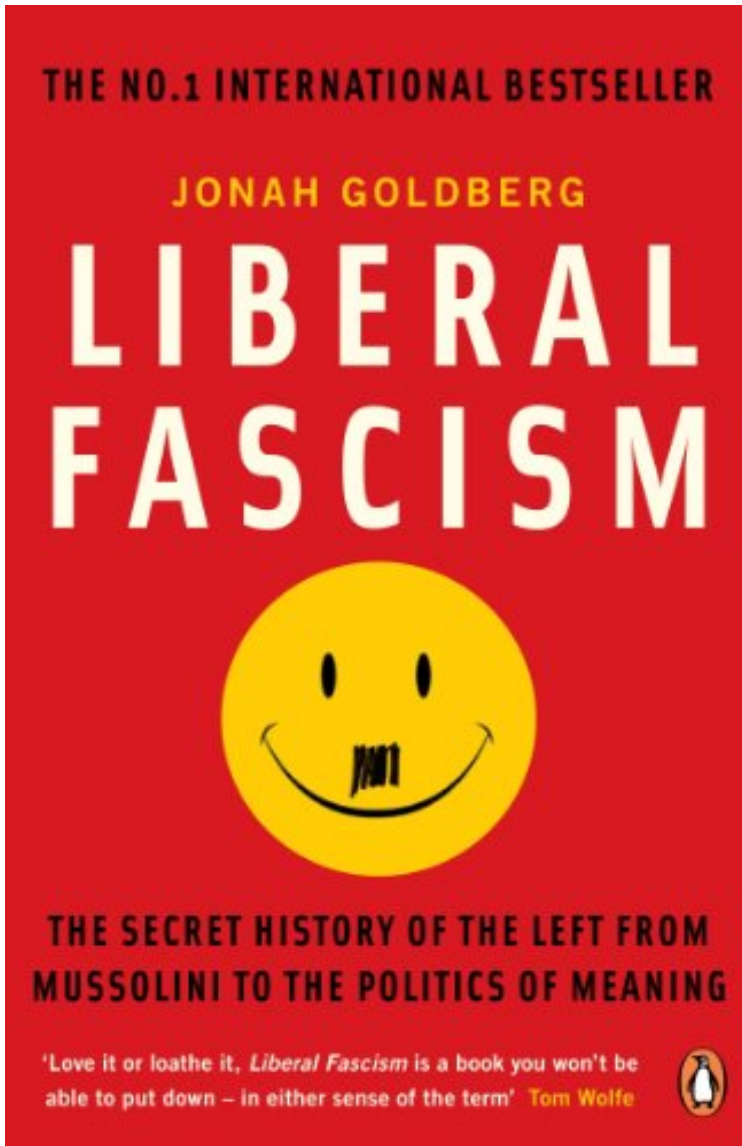


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Liberal Fascism: The Secret History of the Left from Mussolini to the Politics of Meaning



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurToday the word 'fascist' is usually an insult aimed at those on the right, from neocons to big business. But what does it really mean? What if the true heirs to fascism were actually those who thought of themselves as being terribly nice and progressive - the liberals?Jonah Goldberg's excoriating, opinion-driving, US bestseller explains why. Here he destroys long-held myths to reveal why the most insidious attempts to control our lives originate from the left, whether it's smoking bans or security cameras. Journeying through history and across culture, he uses surprising examples ranging from Woodrow Wilson's

police state to the Clinton personality cult, the military chic of 60s' student radicals to Hollywood's totalitarian aesthetics, to show that it is modern progressivism - and not conservatism - that shares the same intellectual roots as fascism. This angry, funny, smart and contentious book looks behind the friendly face of the well-meaning liberal, and turns our preconceptions inside out.

Extrait* 1 *Mussolini: The Father of Fascism

You're the top! You're the Great Houdini! You're the top! You are Mussolini! An early version of the Cole Porter song You're the Top (1) IF YOU WENT solely by what you read in the New York Times or the New York of Books, or what you learned from Hollywood, you could be forgiven for thinking that Benito Mussolini came to power around the same time as Adolf Hitler or even a little bit later and that Italian Fascism was merely a tardy, watered-down version of Nazism. Germany passed its hateful race policies the Nuremberg Laws in 1935, and Mussolini's Italy followed suit in 1938. German Jews were rounded up in 1942, and Jews in Italy were rounded up in 1943. A few writers will casually mention, in parenthetical asides, that until Italy passed its race laws there were actually Jews serving in the Italian government and the Fascist Party. And on occasion you'll notice a nod to historical accuracy indicating that the Jews were rounded up only after the Nazis had invaded northern Italy and created a puppet government in Salo. But such inconvenient facts are usually skipped over as quickly as possible. More likely, your understanding of these issues comes from such sources as the Oscar-winning film *Life Is Beautiful*, (2) which can be summarized as follows: Fascism arrived in Italy and, a few months later, so did the Nazis, who carted off the Jews. As for Mussolini, he was a bombastic, goofy-looking, but highly effective dictator who made the trains run on time. All of this amounts to playing the movie backward. By the time Italy reluctantly passed its shameful race laws which it never enforced with even a fraction of the barbarity shown by the Nazis over 75 percent of Italian Fascism's reign had already transpired. A full sixteen years elapsed between the March on Rome and the passage of Italy's race laws. To start with the Jews when talking about Mussolini is like starting with FDR's internment of the Japanese: it leaves a lot of the story on the cutting room floor.

Throughout the 1920s and well into the 1930s, fascism meant something very different from Auschwitz and Nuremberg. Before Hitler, in fact, it never occurred to anyone that fascism had anything to do with anti-Semitism. Indeed, Mussolini was supported not only by the chief rabbi of Rome but by a substantial portion of the Italian Jewish community (and the world Jewish community). Moreover, Jews were overrepresented in the Italian Fascist movement from its founding in 1919 until they were kicked out in 1938. Race did help turn the tables of American public opinion on Fascism. But it had nothing to do with the Jews. When Mussolini invaded Ethiopia, Americans finally started to turn on him. In 1934 the hit Cole Porter song You're the Top engendered nary a word of controversy over the line You are Mussolini! When Mussolini invaded that poor but noble African kingdom the following year, it irrevocably marred his image, and Americans decided they had had enough of his act. It was the first war of conquest by a Western European nation in over a decade, and Americans were distinctly unamused, particularly liberals and blacks. Still, it was a slow process. The Chicago Tribune initially supported the invasion, as did reporters like Herbert Matthews. Others claimed it would be hypocritical to condemn it. The New Republic then in the thick of its pro-Soviet phase believed it would be naive to blame Mussolini when the real culprit was international capitalism. And more than a few prominent Americans continued to support him, although quietly. The poet Wallace Stevens, for example, stayed pro-Fascist. I am pro-Mussolini, personally, he wrote to a friend. The Italians, he explained, have as much right to take Ethiopia from the coons as the coons had to take it from the boaconstrictors. (3) But over time, largely due to his subsequent alliance with Hitler, Mussolini's image never recovered. That's not to say he didn't have a good ride. In 1923 the journalist Isaac F. Marcosson wrote admiringly in the New York Times that Mussolini is a Latin [Teddy] Roosevelt who first acts and then inquires if it is legal. He has been of great service to Italy at home. (4) The American Legion, which has been for nearly its entire history a great and generous American institution, was founded the same year as Mussolini's takeover and, in its early years, drew inspiration from the Italian Fascist movement. Do not forget, the legion's national commander declared that same year, that the Fascisti are to Italy what the American Legion is to the United States. (5) In 1926 the American humorist Will Rogers visited Italy and interviewed Mussolini. He told the New York Times that Mussolini was some Wop. Im pretty high on that bird. Rogers, whom the National Press Club had informally dubbed Ambassador at Large of the United States, wrote up the interview for the Saturday Evening Post. He concluded, Dictator form of government is the greatest form of government: that is if you have the right Dictator. (6) In 1927 the Literary Digest conducted an editorial survey asking the question: Is there a dearth of great men? The person named most often to refute the charge was Benito Mussolini followed by Lenin, Edison, Marconi, and Orville Wright,

with Henry Ford and George Bernard Shaw tying for sixth place. In 1928 the Saturday Evening Post glorified Mussolini even further, running an eightpart autobiography written by Il Duce himself. The series was gussied up into a book that gained one of the biggest advances ever given by an American publisher. And why shouldn't the average American think Mussolini was anything but a great man? Winston Churchill had dubbed him the world's greatest living lawgiver. Sigmund Freud sent Mussolini a copy of a book he cowrote with Albert Einstein, inscribed, To Benito Mussolini, from an old man who greets in the Ruler, the Hero of Culture. The opera titans Giacomo Puccini and Arturo Toscanini were both pioneering Fascist acolytes of Mussolini. Toscanini was an early member of the Milan circle of Fascists, which conferred an aura of seniority not unlike being a member of the Nazi Party in the days of the Beer Hall Putsch. Toscanini ran for the Italian parliament on a Fascist ticket in 1919 and didn't repudiate Fascism until twelve years later. (7) Mussolini was a particular hero to the muckraker those progressive liberal journalists who famously looked out for the little guy. When Ida Tarbell, the famed reporter whose work helped break up Standard Oil, was sent to Italy in 1926 by McCalls to write a series on the Fascist nation, the U.S. State Department feared that this pretty red radical would write nothing but violent anti-Mussolini articles. Their fears were misplaced. Tarbell was wooed by the man she called a despot with a dimple, praising his progressive attitude toward labor. Similarly smitten was Lincoln Steffens, another famous muckraker, who is today perhaps dimly remembered for being the man who returned from the Soviet Union declaring, I have been over into the future, and it works. Shortly after that declaration, he made another about Mussolini: God had formed Mussolini out of the rib of Italy. As we see, Steffens saw no contradiction between his fondness for Fascism and his admiration of the Soviet Union. Even Samuel McClure, the founder of McClures Magazine, the home of so much famous muckraking, championed Fascism after visiting Italy. He hailed it as a great step forward and the first new ideal in government since the founding of the American Republic. (8) Meanwhile, almost all of Italy's most famous and admired young intellectuals and artists were Fascists or Fascist sympathizers (the most notable exception was the literary critic Benedetto Croce). Giovanni Papini, the magical pragmatist so admired by William James, was deeply involved in the various intellectual movements that created Fascism. Papini's Life of Christa turbulent, almost hysterical tour de force chronicling his acceptance of Christianity caused a sensation in the United States in the early 1920s. Giuseppe Prezzolini, a frequent contributor to the New Republic who would one day become a respected professor at Columbia University, was one of Fascism's earliest literary and ideological architects. F. T. Marinetti, the founder of the Futurist movement which in America was seen as an artistic companion to Cubism and Expressionism was instrumental in making Italian Fascism the world's first successful youth movement. America's education establishment was keenly interested in Italy's breakthroughs under the famed schoolmaster Benito Mussolini, who, after all, had once been a teacher. Perhaps no elite institution in America was more accommodating to Fascism than Columbia University. In 1926 it established Casa Italiana, a center for the study of Italian culture and a lecture venue for prominent Italian scholars. It was Fascism's veritable home in America and a schoolhouse for budding Fascist ideologues, according to John Patrick Diggins. Mussolini himself had contributed some ornate Baroque furniture to Casa Italiana and had sent Columbia's president, Nicholas Murray Butler, a signed photo thanking him for his most valuable contribution to the promotion of understanding between Fascist Italy and the United States. (9) Butler himself was not an advocate of fascism for America, but he did believe it was in the best interests of the Italian people and that it had been a very real success, well worth studying. This subtle distinction fascism is good for Italians, but maybe not for America was held by a vast array of prominent liberal intellectuals in much the same way some liberals defend Castro's communist experiment. While academics debated the finer points of Mussolini's corporatist state, mainstream America's interest in Mussolini far outstripped that of any other international figure in the 1920s. From 1925 to 1928 there were more than a hundred articles written on Mussolini in American publications and only fifteen on Stalin. (10) For more than a decade the New York Times foreign correspondent Anne O'Hare McCormick painted a glowing picture of Mussolini that made the Times later fawning over Stalin seem almost critical. The New York Tribune was vexed to answer the question: Was Mussolini Garibaldi or Caesar? Meanwhile, James A. Farrell, the head of U.S. Steel, dubbed the Italian dictator the greatest living man in the world. Hollywood moguls, noting his obvious theatrical gifts, hoped to make Mussolini a star of the big screen, and he appeared in The Eternal City (1923), starring Lionel Barrymore. The film recounts the battles between communists and Fascists for control of Italy, and mirabile dictu Hollywood takes the side of the Fascists. His deportment on the screen, one reviewer proclaimed, lends weight to the theory that this is just where he belongs. (11) In 1933

Columbia Pictures released a documentary called *Mussolini Speaks* supervised by Il Duce himself. Lowell Thomas the legendary American journalist who had made *Lawrence of Arabia* famous worked closely on the film and provided fawning commentary throughout. Mussolini was portrayed as a heroic strongman and national savior. When the crescendo builds before Mussolini gives a speech in Naples, Thomas declares breathlessly, This is his supreme moment. He stands like a modern Caesar! The film opened to record business at the RKO Palace in New York. Columbia took out an ad in *Variety* proclaiming the film a hit in giant block letters because it appeals to all RED BLOODED AMERICANS and it might be the ANSWER TO AMERICA'S NEEDS. Fascism certainly had its critics in the 1920s and 1930s. Ernest Hemingway was skeptical of Mussolini almost from the start. Henry Miller disliked Fascism's program but admired Mussolini's will and strength. Some on the so-called Old Right, like the libertarian Albert J. Nock, saw Fascism as just another kind of statism. The nativist Ku Klux Klan ironically, often called American fascists by liberals tended to despise Mussolini and his American followers (mainly because they were immigrants). Interestingly, the hard left had almost nothing to say about Italian Fascism for most of its first decade. While liberals were split into various unstable factions, the American left remained largely oblivious to Fascism until the Great Depression. When the left did finally start attacking Mussolini in earnest largely on orders from Moscow they lumped him in essentially the same category as Franklin Roosevelt, the socialist Norman Thomas, and the progressive Robert La Follette. (12) We'll be revisiting how American liberals and leftists viewed Fascism in subsequent chapters. But first it seems worth asking, how was this possible? Given everything we've been taught about the evils of fascism, how is it that for more than a decade this country was in significant respects pro-fascist? Even more vexing, how is it considering that most liberals and leftists believe they were put on this earth to oppose fascism with every breath that many if not most American liberals either admired Mussolini and his project or simply didn't care much about it one way or the other? The answer resides in the fact that Fascism was born of a fascist moment in Western civilization, when a coalition of intellectuals going by various labels progressive, communist, socialist, and so forth believed the era of liberal democracy was drawing to a close. It was time for man to lay aside the anachronisms of natural law, traditional religion, constitutional liberty, capitalism, and the like and rise to the responsibility of remaking the world in his own image. God was long dead, and it was long overdue for men to take His place. Mussolini, a lifelong socialist intellectual, was a warrior in this crusade, and his Fascist doctrine he created from the same intellectual material Lenin and Trotsky had built their movements with was a grand leap into the era of experimentation that would sweep aside old dogmas and usher in a new age. This was in every significant way a project of the left as we understand the term today, a fact understood by Mussolini, his admirers, and his detractors. Mussolini declared often that the nineteenth century was the century of liberalism and the twentieth century would be the century of Fascism. It is only by examining his life and legacy that we can see how right and left he was. * * * Benito Amilcare Andrea Mussolini was named after three revolutionary heroes. The name Benito a Spanish name, as opposed to the Italian equivalent, Benedetto was inspired by Benito Jurez, the Mexican revolutionary turned president who not only toppled the emperor Maximilian but had him executed. The other two names were inspired by now-forgotten heroes of anarchist socialism, Amilcare Cipriani and Andrea Costa. Mussolini's father, Alessandro, was a blacksmith and ardent socialist with an anarchist bent who was a member of the First International along with Marx and Engels and served on the local socialist council. Alessandro's [h]eart and mind were always filled and pulsing with socialistic theories, Mussolini recalled. His intense sympathies mingled with [socialist] doctrines and causes. He discussed them in the evening with his friends and his eyes filled with light. (13) On other nights Mussolini's father read him passages from *Das Kapital*. When villagers brought their horses to Alessandro's shop to be shod, part of the price came in the form of listening to the blacksmith spout his socialist theories. Mussolini was a congenital rabble-rouser. At the age of ten, young Benito led a demonstration against his school for serving bad food. In high school he called himself a socialist, and at the age of eighteen, while working as a substitute teacher, he became the secretary of a socialist organization and began his career as a left-wing journalist. From the Hardcover edition. From *Publishers Weekly* In this provocative and well-researched book, Goldberg probes modern liberalism's spooky origins in early 20th-century fascist politics. With chapter titles such as *Adolf Hitler: Man of the Left* and *Brave New Village: Hillary Clinton and the Meaning of Liberal Fascism* Goldberg argues that fascism has always been a phenomenon of the left. This is Goldberg's first book, and he wisely curbs his wry National style. Goldberg's study of the conceptual overlap between fascism and ideas emanating from the environmental movement, Hollywood, the Democratic Party and what he calls other left-wing organs is shocking and hilarious. He lays

low such lights of liberal history as Margaret Sanger, apparently a radical eugenicist, and JFK, whose cult of personality, according to Goldberg, reeks of fascist political theater. Much of this will be music to conservatives' ears, but other readers may be stopped cold by the parallels Goldberg draws between Nazi Germany and the New Deal. The book's tone suffers as it oscillates between revisionist historical analyses and the application of fascist themes to American popular culture; nonetheless, the controversial arc Goldberg draws from Mussolini to *The Matrix* is well-researched, seriously argued and funny. (Jan. 8)

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