

[Excerpts from] INTRODUCTION

Growing up with parents who'd fled Europe as refugees, I was raised with stories of the heroic nation that helped defeat Hitler's armies and usher in an unprecedented era of liberal democracy in the West. Near the end of his life, gravely ill with Parkinson's disease, my father insisted on visiting the beaches of Normandy. Leaning on the shoulder of his wife, my stepmother, he fulfilled a lifelong dream, walking where so many brave American youth lost their lives in the battle against fascism...

Before World War II, Charles Lindbergh typified American heroism with his daring flights, including the first solo transatlantic flight, and his celebration of new technology. He parlayed his fame and heroic stature into a leading role in the America First movement, which opposed America's entrance into the war against Nazi Germany. In 1939, in an essay entitled "Aviation, Geography, and Race," published in that most American of journals, Reader's Digest, Lindbergh embraced something close to Nazism for America:

It is time to turn from our quarrels and to build our White ramparts again. This alliance with foreign races means nothing but death to us. It is our turn to guard our heritage from Mongol and Persian and Moor, before we become engulfed in a limitless foreign sea. [Footnote omitted.]

The year 1939 was also when my father, Manfred, then six years old, escaped Nazi Germany, ..after spending months in hiding. He arrived in New York City on August 3, 1939, his ship sailing past the Statue of Liberty... We have a family album from the 1920s and '30s. The last page has six different pictures of the Statue of Liberty gradually coming into view.

The America First movement was the public face of pro-fascist sentiment in the United States at that time. [Footnote omitted.] In the twenties and thirties, many Americans shared Lindbergh's views against immigration, especially by non-Europeans. The Immigration Act of 1924 strictly limited immigration..., and it was specifically intended to restrict ...both nonwhites and Jews. In 1939, the United States allowed so few refugees ... that it is a miracle that my father happened to be among them.

In 2016, Donald Trump revived 'America First' as one of his slogans,...

If Trump recalled Lindbergh specifically with 'America First,' the rest of his campaign also longed for some vague point in history—to 'Make

America Great Again.’ But when, exactly, was America great, in the eyes of the Trump campaign? During the nineteenth century, when the United States enslaved its black population? During Jim Crow, when black Americans in the South were prevented from voting? A hint about the decade that was most salient to the Trump campaign emerges from a November 18, 2016, Hollywood Reporter interview with Steve Bannon, the then president-elect’s chief strategist, in which he remarks about the era to come that ‘it will be as exciting as the 1930s.’ In short, the era when the United States had its most sympathy for fascism

. . . .

I have chosen the label ‘fascism’ for ultranationalism of some variety (ethnic, religious, cultural), with the nation represented in the person of an authoritarian leader who speaks on its behalf....

My interest in this book is in fascist politics. Specifically, my interest is in fascist tactics as a mechanism to achieve power. Once those who employ such tactics come to power, the regimes they enact are in large part determined by particular historical conditions. What occurred in Germany was different from what occurred in Italy. Fascist politics does not necessarily lead to an explicitly fascist state, but it is dangerous nonetheless.

Fascist politics includes many distinct strategies: the mythic past, propaganda, anti-intellectualism, unreality, hierarchy, victimhood, law and order, sexual anxiety, appeals to the heartland, and a dismantling of public welfare and unity. Though a defense of certain elements is legitimate and sometimes warranted, there are times in history when they come together in one party or political movement. These are dangerous moments. In the United States today, ...these strategies [are employed] with more and more frequency. ...[The] increasing tendency to engage in this politics should give honest conservatives pause.

The dangers of fascist politics come from the particular way in which it dehumanizes segments of the population. By excluding these groups, it limits the capacity for empathy among other citizens, leading to the justification of inhumane treatment, from repression of freedom, mass imprisonment, and expulsion to, in extreme cases, mass extermination.

Genocides and campaigns of ethnic cleansing are regularly preceded by the kinds of political tactics described in this book. In the cases of Nazi Germany, Rwanda, and contemporary Myanmar, the victims of ethnic cleansing were subjected to vicious rhetorical attacks by leaders and in the press for months or years before the regime turned genocidal. With these

precedents, it should concern all Americans ...[when immigrant groups are] publicly and explicitly insulted...

Fascist politics can dehumanize minority groups even when an explicitly fascist state does not arise. [Footnote omitted.]

...

The most telling symptom of fascist politics is division. It aims to separate a population into an 'us' and a 'them.' Many kinds of political movements involve such a division; for example, Communist politics weaponizes class divisions. Giving a description of fascist politics involves describing the very specific way that fascist politics distinguishes 'us' from 'them,' appealing to ethnic, religious, or racial distinctions, and using this division to shape ideology and, ultimately, policy. Every mechanism of fascist politics works to create or solidify this distinction.

Fascist politicians justify their ideas by breaking down a common sense of history in creating a **mythic past** to support their vision for the present. They rewrite the population's shared understanding of reality by twisting the language of ideals through **propaganda** and promoting **anti-intellectualism**, attacking universities and educational systems that might challenge their ideas. Eventually, with these techniques, fascist politics creates a state of **unreality**, in which conspiracy theories and fake news replace reasoned debate.

As the common understanding of reality crumbles, fascist politics makes room for dangerous and false beliefs to take root. First, fascist ideology seeks to naturalize group difference, thereby giving the appearance of natural, scientific support for a **hierarchy** of human worth. When social rankings and divisions solidify, fear fills in for understanding between groups. Any progress for a minority group stokes feelings of **victimhood** among the dominant population. **Law and order** politics has mass appeal, casting 'us' as lawful citizens and 'them,' by contrast, as lawless criminals whose behavior poses an existential threat to the manhood of the nation. **Sexual anxiety** is also typical of fascist politics as the patriarchal hierarchy is threatened by growing gender equity.

As the fear of 'them' grows, 'we' come to represent everything virtuous. 'We' live in the rural heartland, where the pure values and traditions of the nation still miraculously exist despite the threat of cosmopolitanism from the nation's cities, alongside the hordes of minorities who live there, emboldened by liberal tolerance. 'We' are hardworking, and have earned our pride of place by struggle and merit. 'They' are lazy, surviving off the goods we produce by exploiting the generosity of our welfare systems, or employing corrupt institutions, such as labor unions,

meant to separate honest, hardworking citizens from their pay. 'We' are makers; 'They' are takers.

Many people are not familiar with the ideological structure of fascism, that each mechanism of fascist politics tends to build on others. They do not recognize the interconnectedness of the political slogans they are asked to repeat. I have written this book in the hope of providing citizens with the critical tools to recognize the difference between legitimate tactics in liberal democratic politics on the one hand, and invidious tactics in fascist politics on the other.

...

In its own history, the United States can find a legacy of the best of liberal democracy as well as the roots of fascist thought (indeed, Hitler was inspired by the Confederacy and Jim Crow laws).

...

Fascism today might not look exactly as it did in the 1930s, but refugees are once again on the road everywhere. In multiple countries, their plight reinforces fascist propaganda that the nation is under siege, that aliens are a threat and danger both within and outside their borders. The suffering of strangers can solidify the structure of fascism. But it can also trigger empathy once another lens is clicked into place.

Stanley, Jason. *How Fascism Works* (pp. xviii-xix). Random House Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.