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## Neoliberalism is Fascism with Better Manners



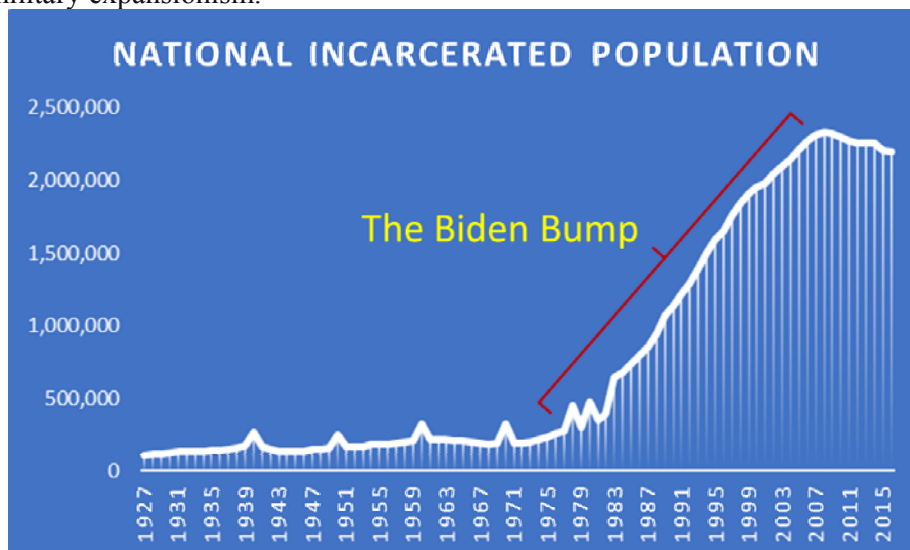
Photograph by Nathaniel St. Clair

The best use of the New York Times is usually catching up on the CIA's talking points for the day. However, back in June of 2019 it published a surprisingly hard hitting [article](#) on Joe Biden's history of crafting and promoting the odious bill that created the modern militarized police and carceral state. The money shot is a quote from Mr. Biden where he seemingly takes credit for mass incarceration: "every major crime bill since 1976 that's come out of this Congress, every minor crime bill, has had the name of the Democratic senator from the State of Delaware: Joe Biden." With Mr. Biden currently drafting 'domestic terrorism' legislation, alarm bells should be sounding.

Considered along with his contribution to the [Patriot Act](#)— the national security and surveillance state wish list passed in the aftermath of 9/11; Mr. Biden appears to be the central protagonist linking domestic political repression to the neoliberal project. Ava DuVernay’s film [13th](#) does a good job giving political and economic context to the American conception and political utility of ‘crime.’ The 1994 Crime Bill written by Mr. Biden created the means by which to force conformity to the dictates of capital. That Mr. Biden appears to have seen law enforcement as a moral endeavor speaks to the hiddenness of its basis in economic production.

This tie of neoliberalism to fascism and political repression comes courtesy of Italian fascist Benito Mussolini. Mr. Mussolini [defined fascism](#), following from Giovanni Gentile, as ‘as merger of corporate and state power.’ The Patriot Act gives the [Federal government](#)— not just the FBI as is generally reported, access to all of the information being gathered by ISPs (Internet Service Providers) and social media platforms. Whatever else it is, social media is an information warehouse for political repression. And the tie of state to corporate power defines the relationship as fascism.

While Mussolini’s definition may read as too generic and bloodless to be of much value, two points. The 1994 Crime Bill that Mr. Biden authored [produced massive political violence](#) against mostly poor people. Given racial composition by class, through the identitarian lens favored by neoliberal Democrats, the Crime Bill makes Mr. Biden one of the most ardent racists of the twentieth century. And while the merger of corporate and state power might read like a definition of ordinary industrial policy, it [gives motive](#) to a preponderance of the Nazi’s military expansionism.



Graph: data from 1926 – 2016 illustrates the onset of mass incarceration in the U.S., which produced the largest relative and absolute carceral populations in the world. This paradox of the ‘land of the free’ has its source in domestic political repression. Richard Nixon created the ‘War on Drugs’ to use against his political enemies. Ronald Reagan put teeth into the

effort by applying state resources to the War on Drugs. Joe Biden wrote the actual legislation of mass incarceration, turning Nixon's waking nightmare into social policy. Source: The Prison Policy Initiative.

The liberal view that the political violence caused by the 1994 Crime Bill is neither political nor violence is based in radical ignorance. Richard Nixon conceived the War on Drugs to control his political enemies. Ronald Reagan gathered the resources to prosecute it. And Joe Biden wrote the legislation that gave it institutional force. In my neighborhood, three generations of community elders will spend the rest of their lives in prison, leaving behind spouses and children to fend for themselves in the post-industrial wastelands that neoliberalism has wrought. Again, the War on Drugs that put them there was a political strategy, not a moral crusade.

The term 'public-private partnership' reads like a relatively innocuous form of pooling resources to achieve social outcomes. Through the neoliberal ethos, the distinction between the public and private realms has been fading as private corporations have been hired to provide public services such as education through Charter Schools; incarceration through private prisons, and military functions like producing materiel and increasingly, active combat. Public debate regarding these arrangements has centered on their efficacy more than their form. That this public-private amalgam is central to the definition of fascism tends to be parsed through perceptions of motives.

One of the revelations that emerged from the Church Committee hearings in 1975 was that the CIA had spied on and infiltrated anti-war groups to undermine them politically. It was thereafter precluded from acting against U.S. citizens domestically. But a loophole was left open that it could contract with private corporations to perform the domestic political functions it had formerly carried out itself. In 2001, within weeks of 9/11, the Patriot Act codified the CIA's ability to work with ISPs (Internet Service Providers) and 'platforms' like Facebook and Twitter to collect and use nominally private information for internally defined purposes.

From the ACLU:

**The Patriot Act increases the governments surveillance powers in four areas:**

- 1. Records searches.** It expands the government's ability to look at records on an individual's activity being held by a third parties. (Section 215)
- 2. Secret searches.** It expands the government's ability to search private property without notice to the owner. (Section 213)
- 3. Intelligence searches.** It expands a narrow exception to the Fourth Amendment that had been created for the collection of foreign intelligence information (Section 218).
- 4. "Trap and trace" searches.** It expands another Fourth Amendment exception for spying that collects "addressing" information about the origin and destination of communications, as opposed to the content (Section 214).

The Patriot Act, which President-elect Joe Biden claims to have written, both codifies the corporate-state form and gives it an explicitly political character. Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg testified publicly that the company uses data-mining techniques to create political profiles of both its users and people who have never had a relationship with the company. To be clear, Facebook is profiling everyone. Through supplying this information to the American government— the CIA, FBI, NSA, etc., to be used towards political ends, the entire technology industry was made a de facto branch of the Federal government.

Conceiving this relationship within the liberal frame of civil liberties is to misunderstand the political-economic form that it takes. The technology industry has grown in close symbiosis with the Federal government through research and development undertaken by the government that was handed over to nominally private technology companies to commercialize. Facebook, Twitter, and the internet for that matter, grew as commercial enterprises in proportion to the Federal government's ability to gather 'intelligence' and disseminate propaganda through them.

Facebook is one of a host of nominally private technology corporations that uses profiles of people— not just its users, to craft social outcomes conducive to the ends that either it, or its customers, determine. This upends the defensive conception of privacy of the Bill of Rights as freedom-from unwarranted government spying and seizures, to place technology companies as propagandists acting on behalf of their customers through social media. Per the Patriot Act, the Federal government and its agencies are explicitly permitted to be Facebook 'customers' to ends that they determine.

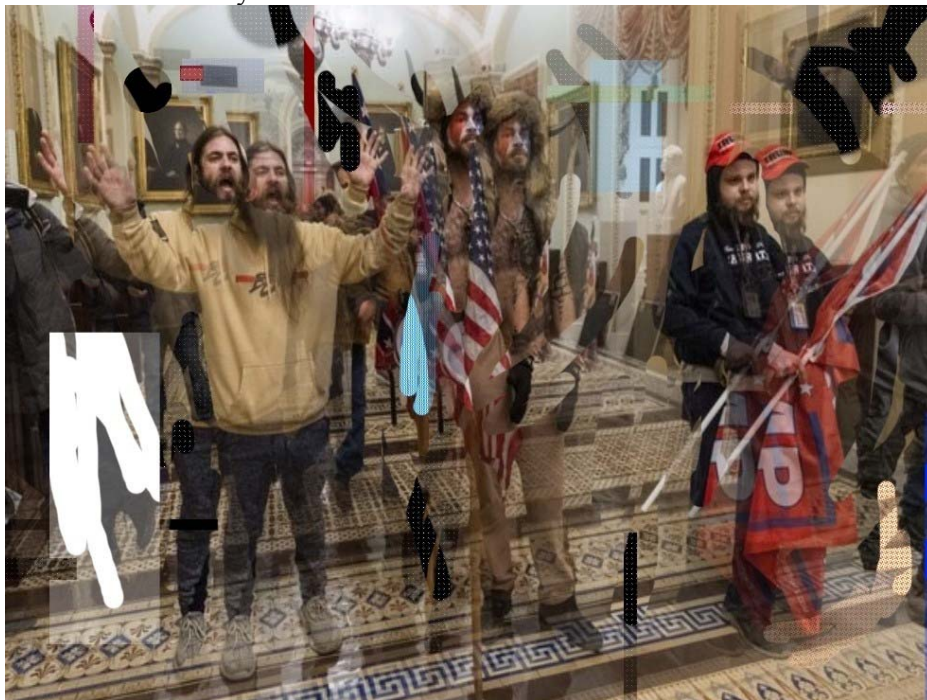


Image: digital painting by Rob Urie based on a photograph from AP.

This ties to the twentieth century conception of fascism as the merging of corporate with state power not simply in form, but in purpose as well. Russiagate was a prime example of this relationship, as nominally private media corporations amplified the claims of the American intelligence agencies that were operating in a political capacity. The domestic goals of the intelligence agencies appear to have been to counteract broad-based political disaffection through stoking reactionary nationalism. The foreign policy objective appears to have been to mitigate growing economic ties between neoliberal, petrostate, Russia and the dominant nations of Europe.

The political posture of Russiagate as a united front against illiberalism, fascism even, is ironic both in the sense of the radical illiberalism— unhinged nationalism to be specific, that it stoked, as well as the caricature of European fascism that it promoted. Despite hysterical warnings from the intelligence agencies in the run-up to the 2020 election that the Russian intelligence services were going to interfere on behalf of Donald Trump, once it was evident that Joe Biden had won, all assertions of malevolent foreign actors ceased. Since then, both Joe Biden and Nancy Pelosi have repeatedly charged that ‘Putin’ is behind domestic political dissent.

In history, it was Democrat Bill Clinton— along with Joe Biden, who was able to pass the ‘Republican’ agenda that included deregulating Wall Street, facilitating the consolidation of media ownership, cutting social welfare programs, militarizing the police, and greatly increasing the scale and scope of the carceral state, after leading Republicans had been unable to. While the CIA was born Republican— Allen Dulles was a committed Republican, it has been liberal Democrats who have been more effective in selling neoliberalism. That neoliberalism is the reigning ideology of power in the U.S. explains the desire its restoration.

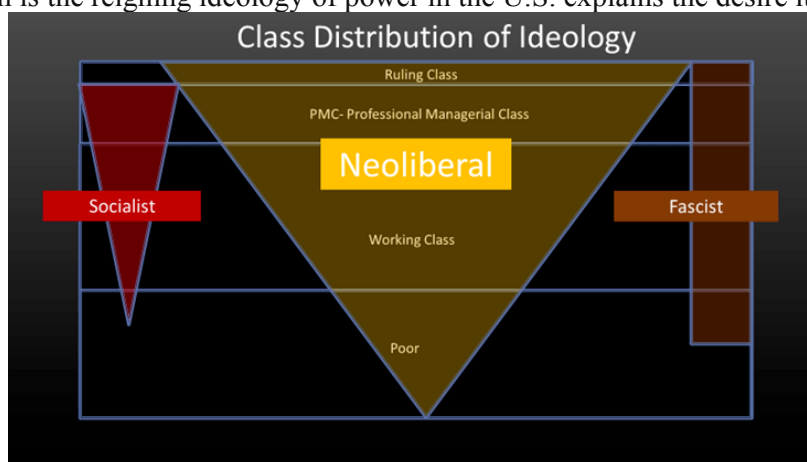


Chart: through five decades of instantiation, neoliberalism is now the state religion in the U.S. The focus of the political left on the street theater and localized violence of racist, neo-confederate and neo-fascist groups is a sideshow relative to the propensity that neoliberal institutions have to commit political violence. Ironically, or not, claims that Koch related right-wing organizations are tied to fascist street violence miss that the Koch-family brand of



fascism is called neoliberalism. Pappa Koch introduced economist, and co-founder of neoliberalism, Friedrich Hayek to the John Birch Society. The irony lies in the posture of neoliberalism in opposition to fascism. For the record, all of the leading Democrats are neoliberals.

The argument of capitalist economists throughout the Great Depression was that twenty-five million people decided to quit their jobs in unison so they could beg for money in the streets. They had no alternative explanation, so they held fast to the economic dogma of the time. The contemporary equivalent is that sure, government policies enacted at the behest of connected industrialists and financiers deindustrialized, and thereby economically eviscerated, much of the country over the last five decades, but where the hell did all of these fascists come from?

Of course, the story is more complicated than this. As the graph above illustrates— because I created it to, the class distribution of fascists probably runs, if history is a guide, from the ruling class to the poor. Of relevance is that 1) ruling class fascists have social power while working class and poor fascists don't, 2) neoliberalism is the state religion, not fascism and 3) however this gets resolved within the existing distribution of power will be a function of what the ruling class decides, not what working class and poor people decide. This ruling class working-through is what Joe Biden was elected to be a front for.

The unwillingness of liberals and the self-described left to come to terms with the political violence that the neoliberal political center is responsible for is ultimately deference to power. Madeleine Albright starved half a million Iraqi children to death for the Clinton administration, but she still has credibility to call other people fascists? George W. Bush killed between 400,000 and three million people in the misguided U.S. adventure in Iraq, but he can show his face in respectable society. Joe Biden is, according to his own words, uniquely responsible for destroying millions of lives through mass incarceration, but he has plausibility to 'restore decency?'

This ongoing crisis of legitimacy will only be resolved by holding existing power to account. The point of the illustration (above) is to identify power separate from the ideology that Americans tend to associate it with. This task won't be undertaken by the political class, and it won't take place within the existing distribution of power. Therefore, the crisis of legitimacy is destined to persist. Revolutionaries don't cause revolutions, concentrated political and economic power does. This (concentrated power) is the problem in need of resolution. But closing down dissent is the most probable near term 'solution.'

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