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## Thirty-One Flavors of Fascism



Photograph by Nathaniel St. Clair

“Leftists” I know have had their undies tied up in a nasty knot bunch over other leftists’ use of the F-word – fascism – to describe Trump and his backers.

Fascism, seriously? Yes, absolutely, provided we have a reasonable definition. In his incisive 2009 book *The Eliminationists: How Hate Talk Radicalized the American Right*, David Neiwert rightly observed that “Fascism is not a single, readily identifiable principle but rather a political pathology best understood (as in psychology) as a constellation of traits. Taken individually,” Neiwert wrote, “many of these traits seem innocuous enough, even readily familiar, a part of the traditional American hurry-burly. A few of them ...are present throughout the political spectrum. Only when taken together does the constellation become clear, and then it is fated to take on a life of its own.”

What comprises this collection of characteristics? Here are my top 29 traits of fascism, cobbled together with no claim to originality in concept or phrasing:

- +1. Obsessive anti-liberalism co-joined with obsessive antisocialism/anti-communism and anti-conservatism but with an understanding that fascists are willing to engage in alliance with other sectors, especially on the conservative side.
- +2. A sense of grave national and social crisis that cannot to effectively met with traditional solutions from liberals and conservatives.
- +3. Fairy-tale and vengeful notions of a glorious national past that was betrayed – “stabbed in the back” – by evil liberal and Left elites linked to a sense of the decline of the nation and/or a once properly dominant ethnic or religious group’s power under the destructive impact of class struggle, radicalism, liberal individualism, multi-culturalism, and outside/alien influences.
- +4. A quest for national re-birth linked to “palingenetic ultra-nationalism,” meaning, in historian Roger Griffin’s words, a drive “to regenerate the social, economic, and cultural life of a country by basing in on a heightened sense of national belonging or national identity.”
- +5. The passionate belief that one’s formerly and properly dominant national, ethnic, and/or religious group is being unfairly victimized.
- +6. A fierce attachment to one’s national, ethnic, and/or religious group coupled with the belief that any action without legal or moral limits is justified to eliminate perceived threats to the group’s enemies, both internal and external.
- +7. Chronic “Us and Them” scapegoating of demonized Others accused of causing great harm.
- +8. The dehumanization of racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural Others and political enemies, intimately related to the willingness to abandon past legal and moral norms when it comes to eliminating the threat(s) these demonized Others and enemies are said to pose.
- +9. The “right” of the supposedly good and “chosen” people to dominate the supposedly bad Others without since the “right” is conferred by Darwinian and moral superiority.
- +10. A fierce and fervent anti-socialism and opposition to Leftists, linked to incessant fearmongering about the real or alleged threat of socialist, communist, and/or left anarchist revolution.
- +11. An obsession with the alleged evil of liberals, combined with a false conflation of liberals and “the Left” and the charge that liberals are too weak to stop Left radicals from “taking over the country.
- +12. Fear, suspicion, and hatred of large, cosmopolitan cities, seen as fetid hotbeds of demonized Others: racial and ethnic minorities, intellectuals, liberals, leftists, intellectuals, feminists, labor activists, civil and human rights movements, “sexual deviants,” and race-mixers.

- +13. A predilection for bizarre, offensive, and dangerous conspiracy theories such as the notion that the Jewish Elders of Zion and George Soros are secretly controlling world events.
- +14. Relentless attacks on intellectuals, expertise, and reasoned public discourse.
- +15. A relentless cultural and propaganda war on truth: constant assaults on the public's capacity to perceive reality.
- +16. Demonization and shaming of the previously normal bourgeois free press as an "enemy of the [chosen] people" combined with the cultivation of separate propagandistic anti-truth news and commentary avenues to reach the fascist base above and beyond "liberal" and "radical Left" media.
- +17. The promotion and glorification of traditional social and political hierarchy beneath revolutionary and transformative claims.
- +18. Hyper-masculinist patriarchy attached to "traditional" oppressive gender roles, the degradation of women, and attacks on women's rights.
- +19. Unceasing attacks on the rule of law while upholding the police and military state in the name of law and order: chronic lawlessness in the name of law and order.
- +20. Rejection of constitutional and parliamentary checks and balances and aspirations for the introduction of a one-party state.
- +21. A Social Darwinian fixation on extreme binaries including triumph vs. defeat, thriving vs. failing, strength vs. weakness, and "greatness" vs. inferiority.
- +22. Contempt for the old, disabled, and infirm, seen as "weak" and worthy of premature death along with nonwhites.
- +23. Promotion of a cult of personality reflecting the perceived necessity of a natural, always male Leader who alone is seen as capable of redeeming the greatness of the betrayed and victimized Nation/chosen people.
- +24. Belief in the superiority of instinct and will over reason and intellectual deliberation and in the preeminence of the Leader's instincts and will over that of others and over abstract reason.
- +25. Constant propaganda to mask objectionable authoritarian, racist, militarist, nativist, and sexist goals with widely accepted ideals like democracy ("the will of the people") and social cohesion.
- +26. Glorification of the military, hyper-militarism, and the exaltation of violence.
- +27. Embrace of violence against political enemies and critics.
- +28. Performative pomp, theatrical gatherings, recurrent menacing hate rallies, and an attachment to grandiose spectacles meant to promote a sense of greatness for the Nation and/or the favored and supposedly victimized racial, ethnic, national, and/or religious group.
- +29. Emotionally potent and extreme statements (the "greatest ever," the "worst ever," "amazing," "horrible" and so on) in defense of the favored/chosen nation/group and in denunciation of demonized Others and "enemies of the people."

+30. The recurrent purging of those considered disloyal to the Leader and his party.

+31. A false populist posture that obscures service to and alliance with capitalist elites and capitalism.

### **“The Left” Can Distinguish Itself from Fascists**

Trump and many millions of his backers – including but not limited to the fascists who stormed the Capitol in a brazen if failed Trump-instigated effort to cancel the certification of a presidential election and spark a coup three weeks ago – check(ed)-off all 31 of these boxes, as I will show in my next book *This Happened Here*. (There is not time or space to provide the evidence for this claim here, but my guess is that many readers easily noted numerous examples as they went through the list).

“Leftists” might want to reflect on this list before they leap to protect Donald Trump, Steve Bannon, Stephen Miller, and other far-right hate mongers’ supposed “free speech right” to reach multiple tens of millions of American and world citizens via Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and You Tube, and before they rush to defend the fascist minions who breached the Capitol complex and forced Congresspersons to flee for their lives under the banner of Trump’s Big Fascist Steal Lie – on the theory that the repression of the far right will only turn back on the portside. This is not a political tendency – fascism – that anyone on the Left should ever want to see shielded in any way in the world’s most powerful country (or anywhere else). Fascism spells ruin for all humanity. Anyone still saying “It Can’t Happen Here” after the Trump presidency needs to be laughed off the stage.

Do leftists seriously believe they are incapable of defending themselves against whatever repression they may face in connection with the repression that government and media and Internet companies impose on fascists from Trump on down? This list (and/or more abbreviated versions of it) could help portsiders more clearly distinguish their movements from those of the white-nationalist far right. In responding to blowback repression, it is important for leftists to be ready to make the case for how our movement(s) are different from, indeed militantly opposed to, fascism as well as to the capitalist, racist, sexist, eco-cidal, and imperialist order that gives rise to fascism. Already, the *New York Times* and other major “liberal” corporate media outlets are dropping whatever partial and halting references they were willing to make (accurately if belatedly) to the “F-word” during the final year and post-election climax of the criminal Trump-Pence administration. They are warning against “populism,” “extremism,” “radicalization,” “anti-establishment anger,” and “terrorism” without the slightest specificity about the fascist menace. They make no distinctions between the egalitarian, loving, and solidaristic *real populism* of the Left and the racist, sexist, nationalist, nativist, authoritarian, hateful, and eco-cidal *fake populism* of the far right. They falsely conflate the beautiful and liberationist anger, “extremism,” and “radicalism” of the Left with the ugly and oppressive anger, “extremism,” and “radicalism” of the far right. They falsely conflate the just burning of a racist police precinct that hatched a vicious white

lyncher (Derek Chauvin) with a murderous fascist assault (the Attack on the Capitol) that was based on the belief that nonwhite votes don't count.

Comrades, learn how to distinguish your movements for social justice, democracy, and environmental sustainability from fascist white nationalism. Keep my list handy for that task. Be ready at all times to recognize and spit out any of these 31 flavors; don't swallow.

Meanwhile, if you are one of those lefties I mentioned at the beginning of this essay, hang on for my next *CounterPunch* essay, titled "The Anatomy of Fascism-Denial: 31 Flavors of Anti-Antifascism." You'll really enjoy that one.

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**Paul Street's** new book is [\*The Hollow Resistance: Obama, Trump, and Politics of Appeasement\*](#).