

### 12.3 Defining Fascism

**Instructions:** There is considerable debate amongst historians and political scientists over the definition of “fascism.” In *How Fascism Works* (Random House, 2018), Jason Stanley, a philosophy professor at Yale University, describes fascism as “ultranationalism of some variety (ethnic, religious, cultural) with the nation represented in the person of an authoritarian leader who speaks on its behalf.” Critics respond that definitions like this one are too broad and include conservative political movements and parties that retain a commitment to democratic institutions. Use the quotations below to answer questions 1-3 and arrive at your own definition of “fascism.”

#### Questions

1. Based on these quotations, how would you define Fascism?
2. In your opinion, was the Nazi movement in Germany under the leadership of Adolph Hitler a uniquely German phenomenon or was it a special case of a broader Fascist movement in Western society between World War I and World War II? Explain.
3. Do you believe fascism is a threat to democratic institutions in the 21st century? Explain.

A. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, *Message to Congress on Monopoly* (*New York Times*, April 30, 1938, 2). “The liberty of a democracy is not safe if the people tolerate the growth of private power to a point where it becomes stronger than their democratic state itself. That, in its essence, is fascism - ownership of Government by an individual, by a group, or by any other controlling private power.”

B. *The Encyclopedia of World History*, 6th Edition (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2001, 643). “Fascist movements that emerged after World War I . . . shared an ideological perspective that subordinated the individual to the state, opposed class struggle, and affirmed nationalist identities and a corporate state. Structures were elitist rather than egalitarian, and there was an emphasis on the role of the great leader.”

C. Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes* (New York: Pantheon, 1994, 125-128). “The optimal conditions for the triumph of the crazy ultra-Right were an old state and its ruling mechanisms which could no longer function; a mass of disenchanted, disoriented and discontented citizens who no longer knew where their loyalties lay; strong socialist movements threatening or appearing to threaten social revolution, but not actually in a position to achieve it; and a move of nationalist resentment against the peace treaties of 1918-1920.”

D. Program of the Communist International (1929), *The Crisis of Capitalism and Fascism* (*A Handbook of Marxism*. New York: International Publishers, 1935, 978-979). “Under certain special historical conditions, the progress of this bourgeois, imperialist, reactionary offensive assumes the form of Fascism. These conditions are: instability of capitalist relations; the existence of considerable declassed social elements, the pauperization of broad strata of the urban petty-bourgeoisie and of the intelligentsia; discontent among the rural petty-bourgeoisie and, finally, the constant menace of mass proletarian action. In order to stabilize and perpetuate its rule, the bourgeoisie is compelled to an increasing degree to abandon the parliamentary system in favor of the Fascist system.”

E. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill (1941-1944) (George Seldes, *The Great Quotations*, New York: Lyle Stuart, 1960, p. 156). “I have always said that if Great Britain were defeated in war I hoped we should find a Hitler to lead us back to our rightful position among the nations . . . He (Hitler) embodied the revolt of Germany against the hard fortunes of war . . . Adolph Hitler is Fuehrer because he exemplifies and enshrines the will of Germany . . . I will not pretend that if I had to choose between Communism and Nazism, I would choose Communism.”