

Still, the most romantic position is not often the most intelligent one. It is unheroic but necessary to explain how the Bush administration threw Americans into a bloody morass and might now get them out. A lover of absolutes would label this task an act of bad faith; I would call it common sense. In a luminous recent essay about successive translations of *Swann's Way*, Hitchens observed, "To be so perceptive and yet so innocent—that, in a phrase, is the achievement of Proust."

The author might also have been speaking about himself, a self-made patriot who has

added to his love of fearless rebels a fierce apology for the neoconservative crusade.

Since Bush's reelection, some of Hitchens's old left-wing friends have urged him to come back home, to confine himself to the elegant slashing of powerful hypocrites on which he built his writerly reputation. But their wish is unlikely to be granted. Christopher Hitchens, you see, is already home. ●

MICHAEL KAZIN is the author of *William Jennings Bryan: A Godly Hero*, forthcoming in January. He is a member of the *Dissent* editorial board and teaches history at Georgetown University.

1. See quotes at <http://www.hitchensweb.com>.

2. Quoted in George Scialabba, "Farewell, Hitch," *N + 1*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2005.

3. <http://64.233.187.104/search?q=cache:jiRS0AuE2RMJ:www.frontpagemag.com/Articles/>

# Fascism and Counterrevolution

## Corey Robin

### THE ANATOMY OF FASCISM

by Robert O. Paxton

*Knopf*, 2004 321 pp \$26 cloth  
*Vintage*, 2005 336 pp \$15 paper

### THE NAZI CONSCIENCE

by Claudia Koonz

*Harvard University Press*, 2003  
362 pp \$29.95 cloth

EVER SINCE William Wordsworth celebrated revolution as a gift of youth and Edmund Burke condemned it as the scourge of age, we've looked upon rebellion and reaction as a clash of generations. The biographies of movement and counter-movement seem to tell the whole story. Both the St. Petersburg uprising of 1905 and the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955 were led by twenty-six-year-olds against regimes donning the mantle of eternity. Malcolm X was killed at

forty, Che Guevara at thirty-nine, while Klemens von Metternich—another internationalist with continental vision—didn't get going until his late thirties. Thomas Jefferson was thirty-three when he wrote the Declaration of Independence, Frantz Fanon thirty-six when he wrote *The Wretched of the Earth*. Burke, by contrast, was sixty-one when he wrote *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. And when tennis champ Billie Jean King beat Bobby Riggs in three straight sets at Houston, she was twenty-nine, while he was, well, old enough to be her father.

But what are we to make of fascism's declaring war on anything and everything that stank of age? During the 1932 election campaign in Germany, Adolf Hitler's handlers depicted their man as a dreamy adventurer with enough *cojones* (notwithstanding that rumor) to tour the country by plane. "In an era when air travel was considered dangerous," writes Claudia Koonz, "Hitler literally descended from the clouds to address audiences of between 120,000 and 300,000 at major cities." Widely distributing a booklet of photos from his air

tour (half a million copies printed), Hitler offered a dynamic contrast to the doddering Paul von Hindenburg, who evoked little more than a war—and later a zeppelin—that failed. So central was the idea of youth to the appeal of Nazism that in a 1934 speech featured in *Triumph of the Will*, Hitler made a special point of declaring the young “our body and soul.”

Or consider the less familiar career of Robert Brasillach, the French writer—and fascist—executed by the Liberation government in 1945 for treason. As Alice Kaplan reports in *The Collaborator*, Brasillach first emerged on the French scene in 1930, an *enfant terrible* with a vicious wit and cruel pen, whose early mastery of the art of literary destruction anticipates the work of such later schoolboy provocateurs as William F. Buckley and the editors of the *Dartmouth Review*. The occasion of Brasillach’s debut was an obituary he wrote of André Gide. Brasillach was twenty, Gide sixty, but the budding fascist could think of no more consequential a criticism to level against the aging communist than to declare Gide a spent force, essentially dead and ready for burial. Years later, Brasillach would write a novel, *The Seven Colors*, in which youth and fascism are so insistently paired that the first seems meant as an argument for the second:

The young fascist, involved with his race and his nation, proud of his vigorous body, his lucid spirit, disdaining the goods of this world, the young fascist in his camp, amidst the comrades of peace who can become comrades of war, the young fascist who sings, who marches, who works, who dreams, is above all a joyous being.

It was fortuitous, if not for Brasillach then at least for the radical right, that the writer was executed at thirty-five: “forever young,” Kaplan notes, Brasillach would be remembered as “the James Dean of French fascism.”

The connections between fascism and youth run even deeper. As Robert Paxton observes, “Fascism was the major political innovation of the twentieth century.” Where communists, conservatives, and liberals found their ideas moldering in the graves of centuries past, fascism was the one movement that could make a legitimate claim to novelty. If fascists looked backward, it was not to the immediate

past, but to a rendition of a past so stylized and remote that it qualified as the future.

**I**S FASCISM THEN a form of revolutionary politics? In their wise and discerning accounts of international fascism and Nazi Germany, respectively, Paxton and Koonz provide cautionary evidence against such a view. Though fascists certainly had a taste and talent for the masses that their leftist rivals would envy and rue, theirs was a war of counterrevolution, waged with weapons purloined from the very cache of history they so categorically rejected.

Condorcet says somewhere that a counterrevolution is a revolution in reverse, to which Joseph de Maistre angrily replied that a counterrevolution is “not a *contrary revolution*, but the *contrary of revolution*.” [italics in original] For Condorcet, counterrevolution is an angry younger brother: no matter how hard he tries to distinguish himself, he is always trailing after his elder sibling. De Maistre wouldn’t have it: though the counterrevolution may begin as a refutation, it ultimately steps out of the revolution’s shadow, achieving its own identity in splendid isolation.

In a sense, they’re both right. Like revolutionaries, counterrevolutionaries take their battle to the streets, fighting block by block for the allegiance of the masses. Like revolutionaries, counterrevolutionaries mock established elites and traditional institutions. But where revolutionaries seek to match their populist rhetoric with popular substance, counterrevolutionaries seldom bring their words and deeds into alignment. Their theory may speak of rejuvenation, but their practice points to renovation, even restoration. They give sclerotic elites a newfound sense of legitimacy, fortifying a tottering old regime with a more sustaining foundation.

This mismatch between radical rhetoric and reactionary substance is not necessarily by design. As Paxton shows, fascism, the most energetic movement of reaction the world has ever seen, only comes to power with the aid of conservative elites, who force fascist leaders like Hitler and Benito Mussolini to abandon their unruly followers and to jettison their reformist programs. But neither is it by default. “Despite their frequent talk about ‘revolution,’” Paxton notes, “fascists did not want a socio-

economic revolution. They wanted a 'revolution of the soul.'" The rhetoric, in other words, was the substance.

Like their counterparts on the left, fascists have a keen eye, arguably keener, for cracks in the old regime. Wolves on the hunt, they spot weakness from afar. But where socialist revolutionaries see opportunity in flailing old regimes, fascists see decadence. Theirs is a politics, Paxton argues, "marked by obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation, or victimhood and by compensatory cults of unity, energy, and purity." The moral universe of fascism expands and contracts in response to pulses of power and powerlessness. Fascists look to violence and war not merely as strategic implements of their will but as affirmations of self and nation. "War is to men as maternity is to women," declared Mussolini. "The character of the Italian nation must be molded by fighting."

Inspired cultists of physical strength and spiritual energy, fascists are horrified by liberal democracy, which saps the nation of its elemental force. Although extra-parliamentary socialism might seem an attractive alternative to these vitalists of the street, its stern egalitarianism reeks of Christian humility and Jewish justice—the very ethics of equity and constraint that fascism seeks to overcome. Hatred of the left in all its guises, from the most tepid to the most *outré*, is thus not incidental to fascism; it is at its core. As Paxton reminds us, the first action Mussolini's forces took was a violent assault on the Milan offices of a socialist newspaper, in which four people were killed and thirty-nine were injured.

It is this hostility to the left that ultimately reconciles the old elites to the new fascists. Europe's ruling classes were bewildered and disoriented by the electoral demands of modern democracy. Though terrified of the left, they could never summon the will to enter its teeming precincts and wrest back the fealty of the masses. Fascists had no such qualms. Brawlers of the first order, they took the fight directly to the communists and socialists. They thus offered the old elites multiple benefits: "a magic formula for weaning workers away from Marxism"; a fabricated "climate of disorder," which sent the middle classes scampering to the right; and a sturdy governing coal-

ition (after months of failing to mount a parliamentary majority, German conservatives welcomed Hitler as a "godsend" because "he held out the possibility for the first time of a parliamentary majority that excluded the Left").

It would be a mistake, however, to make too much of fascism's mass following. As Paxton reminds us, in the last nominally free election in pre-war Germany, more than one out of two voters cast ballots against the Nazis; in the one free election in which the Italian fascists participated, they got only 35 of 535 seats. Fascism never comes to power through popular mobilization, electoral majorities, or even violent coups. "The fascist route to power has always passed through cooperation with conservative elites," writes Paxton. Speaking on behalf of conservative interests, King Victor Emmanuel III and President Hindenburg, constitutional heads of state exercising their legitimate powers, literally invited Mussolini and Hitler to take office. "Without the acquiescence or even active assent of the traditional elites," Paxton argues, fascists "could never attain power." Fascism is thus as much an affair of the classes as it is of the masses.

HAVING COME into office with the help of established elites, fascists are perpetually constrained by their entanglement with the old order. Nowhere are these constraints more evident than in the realm of economic policy. Trolling for votes, fascists often indulge in anti-capitalist rhetoric. Once in power, they quickly drop it. As early as 1932, in a speech before the Düsseldorf Industrialists' Club, Hitler sought to placate capital, confessing that his Social Darwinism extended all the way to the economy. Although Paxton agonizes needlessly over the oft-debated relationship between fascism and capitalism, he ultimately declares that big business and the fascist right "made practicable bedfellows (though not inevitable ones, nor always comfortable ones)." Marxists and their critics will undoubtedly chew on this formulation for some time to come, but Paxton's more telling point, it seems to me, is how fascism synthesizes pseudo-populism and intransigent elitism, offering "a new recipe for governing with popular support but without any sharing of power

with the Left, and without any threat to conservative social and economic privileges and political dominance.”

Though Paxton is an excellent guide to the political maneuverings that send elites rushing into the arms of the fascists, he is less helpful explaining how the fascists deliver the masses to the elites. (Though again we should be careful: most working-class voters, particularly in the labor movement and leftist parties, voted against the fascists.) For Paxton, fascism’s appeal is primarily emotional. It is an “affair of the gut” not “of the brain,” a swamp of “mobilizing passions” rather than a set of “reasoned propositions.” This, unfortunately, is a view all too common among analysts of right-wing politics. Discounting the force of ideas on the right, Paxton is unable to recognize or unwilling to acknowledge that the popular classes may actually assent, rationally, to fascism’s basic claims. As a result, he fails to see how fascists adapt traditional notions of deference and hierarchy to a mass audience, how they package and sell feudal ideas of higher and lower orders to a society of presumably democratic sensibilities. For that is the function of what Paxton calls “passionate nationalism” and Koonz calls “ethnic fundamentalism”: to allow the masses a taste of privilege without jeopardizing the iron laws of oligarchy.

UNLIKE PAXTON, Koonz takes right-wing ideas seriously—so seriously that she believes they contributed to a distinctive and reflective “Nazi conscience.” That conscience defined the German people as a superior ethnic community bound together by history, language, values, and culture. Averting the death of that community was the “benchmark” of Nazi “moral reasoning.” According to Joseph Goebbels, the “first Commandment of every National Socialist” was to “love Germany above all else and your ethnic comrade as your self!”

Part of the appeal of this ethnic comradeship, according to Koonz, was that it “held out an egalitarian and ecumenical promise to members of a so-called community of fate.” This populist spirit pervaded all walks of life. Addressing audiences, Nazi officials used the informal *Du* rather than the stuffier *Sie*; they also discouraged the use of *Frau* and *Herr*. A Party hand-

book described Kant’s categorical imperative as “the only conceivable basis for collective life” because it enjoined “a spirit of mutual assistance.” Party members and education ministers urged teachers to treat their students as comrades, at times adopting the most fanciful, Deweyite rhetoric: “Education succeeds when every hour of instruction becomes an experience. Dry, scientific formats don’t shape the person. Experience does.” Martin Heidegger, for one, took these injunctions to heart. According to Koonz, he helped plan “academic retreats that would enhance ethnic rapport between faculty and graduate students” and led a weeklong “Knowledge Camp” at his mountain cabin.

Throughout the 1930s, one of the Nazis’ chief challenges was to convert this ethnic fundamentalism into rabid anti-Semitism. hindsight would suggest that this was hardly a monumental task: recalling the words of *Mein Kampf* or the racism of the Nazis’ twenty-five-point platform, not to mention the almost daily pogroms following Hitler’s ascension to power or the rampages of *Kristallnacht*, the distance between love of the *volk* and Auschwitz seems not so great. But as Koonz shows, Hitler and the Nazis were frequently forced to pull back, at least in public, from their more ambitious programs of anti-Semitism. After a failed 1933 boycott of Jewish shops and firms provoked domestic and international outrage, Hitler retreated from making public statements about Jewish policy until the Nuremberg laws of 1935. Journalists, diplomats, camp followers, and even Jews marveled at Hitler’s carefully engineered public transformation: from the Jew-hating thug of the Beer Hall Putsch to the anticommunist leader, “attired in a white shirt, tie, and black suit with a discreet swastika lapel pin,” who “said barely a word about Jewry.” While party thugs binged on street violence, Hitler publicly—and cynically—condemned attacks on Jews, urging his followers not to let themselves “be distracted for one second from our watchword, which is the destruction of Marxism.” Goebbels understood all too well that “the best propaganda” was like gas: it “works invisibly, penetrates the whole of life [. . .].” Thus of the two thousand films his ministry approved for distribution between 1933 and 1939, exactly three were overtly anti-

Semitic. Heinrich Himmler, for his part, employed some three thousand staffers to monitor the German public's *Stimmung und Haltung* ("mood and attitude"). From their reports, writes Koonz, "it soon became clear that most Germans deplored lawless attacks on Jews."

While Nazi leaders soft-pedaled the Jewish Question in public, mid-level operatives stealthily prepared the ideological ground for its final solution in private. And here we come to the other side of Nazi egalitarianism: its burgeoning genocidal ambitions. "The etiology of this [genocidal] consensus," writes Koonz, "evolved not as a clear evil but rather as the shadow side of virtue." Directly linked to the Nazis' kitschy ethnic fundamentalism, genocidal racism infiltrated public consciousness—and more important, the minds of government officials—slowly and through institutional channels. It emerged neither, as Daniel Goldhagen would have it, from a deep culture of anti-Semitism nor, as Christopher Browning has argued, from the cru-

cible of war. It was during the 1930s, a time of uneasy peace, that the Nazis politically transformed their folksy democracy into an avenging army of racial supremacy.

With the aid of professionals and bureaucrats, the Nazis propounded the view that it was "morally acceptable—especially in wartime—to extinguish 'lower' civilizations that stood in the way of 'progress.'" Such views, Koonz reminds us, were hardly without precedent. She cites a chilling editorial from L. Frank Baum, creator of the Wizard of Oz, calling Native Americans "a pack of whining curs who lick the hand that smites them" and that asked, "Why not annihilation?" (Koonz might also have cited Thomas Jefferson, who, anticipating the Nazis by more than a century, saw no future for freed blacks other than deportation or extermination. Unless they were "removed beyond the reach of mixture" with whites, he warned, emancipated slaves would "produce convulsions which will probably never end but in the extermination of the one or the other race.")

But such views had to be cultivated sub rosa, in educational manuals, academic conferences, legal seminars, and medical journals. Professors were among the Nazis' most avid supporters, and once they brought their scholarship into line with Nazi racial doctrine, their research was disseminated in textbooks, museum exhibits, and the media. Sailing under the flag of science, these racist displays did not arouse popular revulsion in the same way that overt violence or party propaganda did—though they helped lay the groundwork for the far more sweeping violence that was to come. So critical was the work of academics to this enterprise that Victor Klemperer noted in his diary that if he ever assumed power after the war, he would "let all the ordinary folks go and even some of the leaders. . . . But I would have all the intellectuals strung up, and the professors three feet higher than the rest; they would be left hanging from the lamp posts for as long as was compatible with hygiene."

**T**HOUGH NEITHER Paxton nor Koonz addresses the counterrevolutionary thrusts of European fascism, their books tell us much about what those thrusts entailed: democratizing feudalism for the modern age. As

### A LEGACY OF IDEAS

A bequest of any size can be of lasting benefit to *Dissent* and help ensure that the ideas and beliefs you hold dear will continue to have a public forum. Our legal name is the Foundation for the Study of Independent Social Ideas. We ask you to consider one of the following options:

1. You can leave a specific amount or a particular asset.

"I bequeath \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to the Foundation for the Study of Independent Social Ideas."

2. You can leave a specific percentage of your estate.

"I bequeath \_\_\_\_\_ percent of my estate to the Foundation for the Study of Independent Social Ideas."

3. You can leave the remainder of your estate.

"After distributing the specific bequests listed above (to others in your will), I leave the remainder of my estate to the Foundation for the Study of Independent Social Ideas."

For more specifics on this or other information on gift planning, feel free to phone or write *Dissent*, 310 Riverside Drive #2008, New York, N.Y. 10025 (212) 316-3120.

every sophisticated counterrevolutionary knows, it is impossible to repeal history, to turn back the clock. If they are to be successful, counterrevolutionaries must offer a newfangled defense of a revamped regime. In the case of fascism, this required an acknowledgment that the tiered world of medieval orders had been leveled by mass democracy. Once this admission was made, fascists could respond by transforming all of Germany—and Italy—into a lordly class and turning all of Eastern Europe and Ethiopia into a giant vassal.

But fascists could never settle for stagnant rule or benign assertions of supremacy. Having read their Darwin, having seen capitalism's creation and dissolution of vast fortunes, they were forced to offer a lordly vision more dynamic than that of the Middle Ages. Genocidal racism proved an ideal substitute. In a world where nothing stood still, it seemed natural to declare war the way of the world (it was Maistre who first noted that "human blood must flow with-

out interruption somewhere or other on the globe, and that for every nation, peace is only a respite") and history a permanent struggle between the races. (Here again, American slavery was the pacesetter. Thomas Dew, one of the South's earliest defenders of slavery, declared in 1832, "The history of the world has too conclusively shown, that two races . . . can never harmonize upon a footing of equality. One must rule the other, or exterminating wars must be waged.") Styling themselves race warriors and imperial marauders, Europe's fascists were able to imagine themselves as crusading knights, defending civilization by any means necessary. It was a bloody business to be sure, but how else to be an aristocrat when all that's solid melts into air? ●

---

COREY ROBIN, author of *Fear: The History of a Political Idea*, teaches political science at Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

---

## Who Polices Scholarship?

**Linda Gordon**

**HISTORIANS IN TROUBLE: PLAGIARISM, FRAUD AND POLITICS IN THE IVORY TOWER**

by Jonathan Wiener

New Press, 2005 260 pp \$24.95

S CANDALS ABOUT historians have grabbed public attention lately, most of all the plagiarism by popular pundits Doris Kearns Goodwin and the late Stephen Ambrose. Academic scholars followed the coverage closely, and more than a few will admit to a smidgen of schadenfreude that such financially successful and celebrated writers were embarrassed. More serious charges, of fraudulent claims, dishonesty, and harassment, have received less publicity. Jonathan Wiener argues that power-

ful conservative interests silence academics they don't like and promote those they do and that the professional organizations, such as the American Historical Association, do not sufficiently defend intellectual integrity. Wiener makes no claim to have surveyed or taken a fair sample of these allegations, but the stories he tells are sobering. They reveal not only scholarly misdeeds but also recent increases in threats to free debate and intellectual integrity.

Yes, of course, universities have always been influenced by politics. The cold war, for example, dampened free inquiry and shut off whole subjects from scrutiny; and in the 1960s and 1970s, radical social movements demanded and won more diverse and inclusive curricula in American universities and even many high schools.

In the last twenty years, however, allega-