

HUMANITIES 5695
Fascism

Fall 2017
Tues., 7:00–9:50pm
Room 5562

INSTRUCTOR

Prof. Joshua DERMAN (hmderman@ust.hk)
Office: Academic Building, Room 3352
Office Hours: Wed. and Thurs., 3:00–4:30pm

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course aims to provide students with an introduction to the comparative study of fascism. It situates fascism in its historical epoch (ca. 1919–1945) while raising questions about its aftershocks and significance for contemporary politics and society. How is fascism different from authoritarianism or “populism”? Does fascism have an aesthetic or distinct approach to organizing political life? What role does the charismatic leader play within the fascist movement? Readings will focus on Italian Fascism and National Socialism, but the overarching theoretical perspectives will also be relevant to students of non-European dictatorships. Attention will be paid to political leadership, social mobilization, coercion and collaboration, political violence and mass killing, and comparative theoretical frameworks. Students will attain a general understanding of the narrative development of fascism, as well as the historiographical and social scientific theories that have been used to interpret them. The course does not presuppose any prior background in European history.

ASSESSMENTS

Participation (attendance is compulsory): 15%

- Asking questions and engaging with your classmates’ comments are key elements of the seminar experience. Adequate preparation is essential.

Two short in-class presentations on the weekly readings: 20%

- Students are required to make two short presentations, possibly in a group setting. Each student’s contribution should last around 5 minutes, certainly no longer than 10 minutes. You should assume that everyone has done the reading; detailed summary or recapitulation of facts is unnecessary. Instead, focus on providing an overview of the argument of the text(s) in question, ideally comparing and contrasting them with other readings from the same or previous week. You are encouraged to raise open-ended questions that can help guide discussion. PowerPoint presentations are welcome but not required.

10 pp. midterm paper: 30% due October 24

- Please choose one of the weekly questions and try to answer it through a discussion of the readings.

10–15 pp. final paper: 35% due December 11

- Choose your own topic or address the following questions: What is fascism’s relationship to democracy? Does it arise from a crisis of democracy? Is it the “shadow side” of democracy? Is it the antithesis of democracy? How does fascism

exploit the language/symbols/techniques/possibilities of mass democracy to come to power?

ASSIGNED TEXTS

The readings are available as books or e-books on reserve in the university library, or as PDFs on the course's Canvas website. You are strongly encouraged to bring hard copies—that is, photocopies or print outs, rather than purely digital versions—to class for discussion.

EXPECTATIONS

Incompletes will not be granted in this course. Please note that this course enforces a zero-tolerance policy on cheating. If a student is found to have cheated or committed plagiarism, he or she will receive an automatic F in the course, and the case will be referred to the university administration for further action. If you have any questions or concerns about standard citation policy, please do not hesitate to ask me.

COURSE OUTLINE

Sept. 5 / Introduction and Orientation

Sept. 12 / Are We There Yet?

Questions to think about:

- *Are there echoes of interwar politics in contemporary democracies? Or are the resemblances deceiving?*
- *What worries liberals about the state of democratic politics?*
- *What are we talking about when we talk about fascism?*

Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century* (London: Bodley Head, 2017).

Jan-Werner Müller, *What is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

Sheri Berman, "Populism Is Not Fascism: But It Could Be A Harbinger," *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 6 (November/December 2016): 39–44.

Sept. 19: What Fascism Was — And Wasn't

Questions to think about:

- *Can fascism be defined? Does it stand for something, or only against something?*
- *Is fascism a political ideology?*
- *What is the relationship between fascism and conservatism — and between fascists and conservatives?*

Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism: Comparison and Definition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980), chap. 1.

Zeev Sternhell, "Fascist Ideology," in *Fascism: A Reader's Guide*, ed. Walter Laqueur (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 325–99.

Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Vintage, 2004), chaps. 1–5, 8.

Sept. 26: The Culture of Fascism

Questions to think about:

- *How does fascism represent itself in public? Does it have a characteristic style?*
- *What is fascism's relationship to preexisting cultural traditions, especially religion?*

George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), chaps. 1, 3, 7.

George L. Mosse, *The Fascist Revolution: Toward a General Theory of Fascism* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1999), introduction, chaps. 1, 3, 4, 6.

Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), preface, introduction, chaps. 2, 3, 4, 6, conclusion.

Oct. 3: The Crisis of Liberal Democracy

Questions to think about:

- *Is modern representative democracy in crisis? If so, what is the nature of the crisis?*
- *To what extent is fascism a claimant to the tradition of popular sovereignty?*
- *How do intellectuals rationalize their embrace of fascism?*

Carl Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, trans. Ellen Kennedy (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988).

Oct. 10: Who Were the Fascists?

Questions to think about:

- *What drew "early adopters" to the Nazi Party? What mattered, or didn't matter, to them?*
- *Did Nazi Party membership have a distinct sociological profile?*

Theodore Abel, *Why Hitler Came Into Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, [1938] 1986).

Oct. 17: Society — Part I

Questions to think about:

- *How did the Nazis come to power?*
- *How did the Nazis penetrate the institutions of daily social life?*
- *What can we learn from adopting a microhistorical perspective?*

William Sheridan Allen, *The Nazi Seizure of Power: The Experience of a Single German Town, 1922–1945* (New York: Watts, 1984), prefaces, chaps. 1–9.

Sheri Berman, “Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic,” *World Politics* 49, no. 3 (1997): 401–29.

Oct. 24: Leaders and Followers

Questions to think about:

- *What is the leader’s role in fascism? In what ways do they actually lead?*
- *How useful are ideal typical concepts for grasping the distinctive character of fascist leadership?*

Hans Mommsen “Hitler’s Position in the Nazi System,” in *From Weimar to Auschwitz* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 163–88.

Ian Kershaw, *The ‘Hitler Myth’: Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), introduction, chapters 1–4, 8, conclusion.

Joshua Derman, “Max Weber and Charisma: A Transatlantic Affair,” *New German Critique* 113 (2011): 51–88.

Oct. 31: The Psychology of Fascism

Questions to think about:

- *Is fascism as psychological condition?*
- *Can it be explained in isolation from societal institutions and constraints?*

T. W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel J. Levinson, R. Nevitt Sanford, *The Authoritarian Personality*, abridged ed. (New York: Norton: 1982), selections.

Theodor W. Adorno, “Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda,” in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, eds. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum 1982), 118–37.

Nov. 7: Fascist Aesthetic

Questions to think about:

- *What is the “look” of fascism? Is it a distinctive one?*
- *How did artists engage with or react to the regime?*

Leni Riefenstahl, *Triumph of the Will* (1935)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHS2coAzLj8>

Susan Sontag, “Fascinating Fascism” (1975)
<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1975/02/06/fascinating-fascism>

Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini’s Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), introduction, chaps. 1–3.

Nov. 14: Society — Part II

Questions to think about:

- *Was fascism a “total” society? How much control were fascist regimes able to exert over everyday life?*
- *What tools did fascist regimes use to control or coerce their populations?*
- *Was opposition possible in fascist societies? How did—or could—it manifest itself?*

Victoria De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), chaps. 1, 3, 4.

Detlev Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition, and Racism in Everyday Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), pp. 49–80, 86–125, 145–83, 197–242.

Allen, *The Nazi Seizure of Power*, chaps. 10–20

Nov. 21: War, Empire, and Genocide

- *How and why do fascist regimes become radicalized?*
- *Does fascism have a foreign policy?*
- *Why did “ordinary” people participate in the atrocities of National Socialism?*

Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, chap. 6

Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (London: Penguin, 1992).

MacGregor Knox, “Conquest, Foreign and Domestic, in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany,” *Journal of Modern History* 56, no. 1 (1984): 1–57.

Nov. 28: Conclusions

Review and discussion of final paper topics

Upon completion of the course, students should be able to:

- (1) Understand the narrative history of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany.
- (2) Master the theories that have been put forward by social scientists to explain the phenomenon of fascism.
- (3) Write thesis-driven analytical essays about the explanatory power of social scientific theory as applied to history.