

Fascism: The Career of a Concept

By Paul E. Gottfried

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What does it mean to label someone a fascist? Today, it is equated with denouncing him or her as a Nazi. But as intellectual historian Paul E. Gottfried writes in this provocative yet even-handed study, the term's meaning has evolved over the years. Gottfried examines the semantic twists and turns the term has endured since the 1930s and traces the word's polemical function within the context of present ideological struggles. Like "conservatism," "liberalism," and other words whose meanings have changed with time, "fascism" has been used arbitrarily over the years and now stands for a host of iniquities that progressives, multiculturalists, and libertarians oppose, even if they offer no single, coherent account of the historic evil they condemn.

Certain factors have contributed to the term's imprecise usage, Gottfried writes, including the equation of all fascisms with Nazism and Hitler, as well as the rise of a post-Marxist left that expresses predominantly cultural opposition to bourgeois society and its Christian and/or national components. Those who stand in the way of social change are dismissed as "fascist," he contends, an epithet that is no longer associated with state corporatism and other features of fascism that were once essential but are now widely ignored. Gottfried outlines the specific historical meaning of the term and argues that it should not be used indiscriminately to describe those who hold unpopular opinions. His important study will appeal to political scientists, intellectual historians, and general readers interested in politics and history.

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Review

“Gottfried’s study is particular, nuanced, and multifaceted . . . a model for the type of work that can earn the right a hearing from more attentive audiences.”
—*The American Conservative*

“*Fascism* is a meticulously researched primer on the true history of one of the world’s worst ideologies. Upon finishing the book, readers will emerge with a firmer understanding of history, philosophy, and the ways in which words shape culture and reality.”
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“Gottfried brings vast erudition and interpretive nuance to the subject of fascism. This book is a significant contribution to the fields of political thought and European history.”
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“*Fascism* is a book of remarkable scholarship and sensitivity regarding some exceedingly complex ideas. Gottfried’s navigation of the ins and outs of the interwar ideological quarrels in Italy and France is especially masterful.”
—Robert Weissberg, emeritus, University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign

About the Author

Paul E. Gottfried is the retired Horace Raffensperger Professor of Humanities at Elizabethtown College and a Guggenheim recipient. He is the author of numerous books, including *The Search for Historical Meaning* (NIU Press, 2010) and, most recently, *Leo Strauss and the Conservative Movement in America*.

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