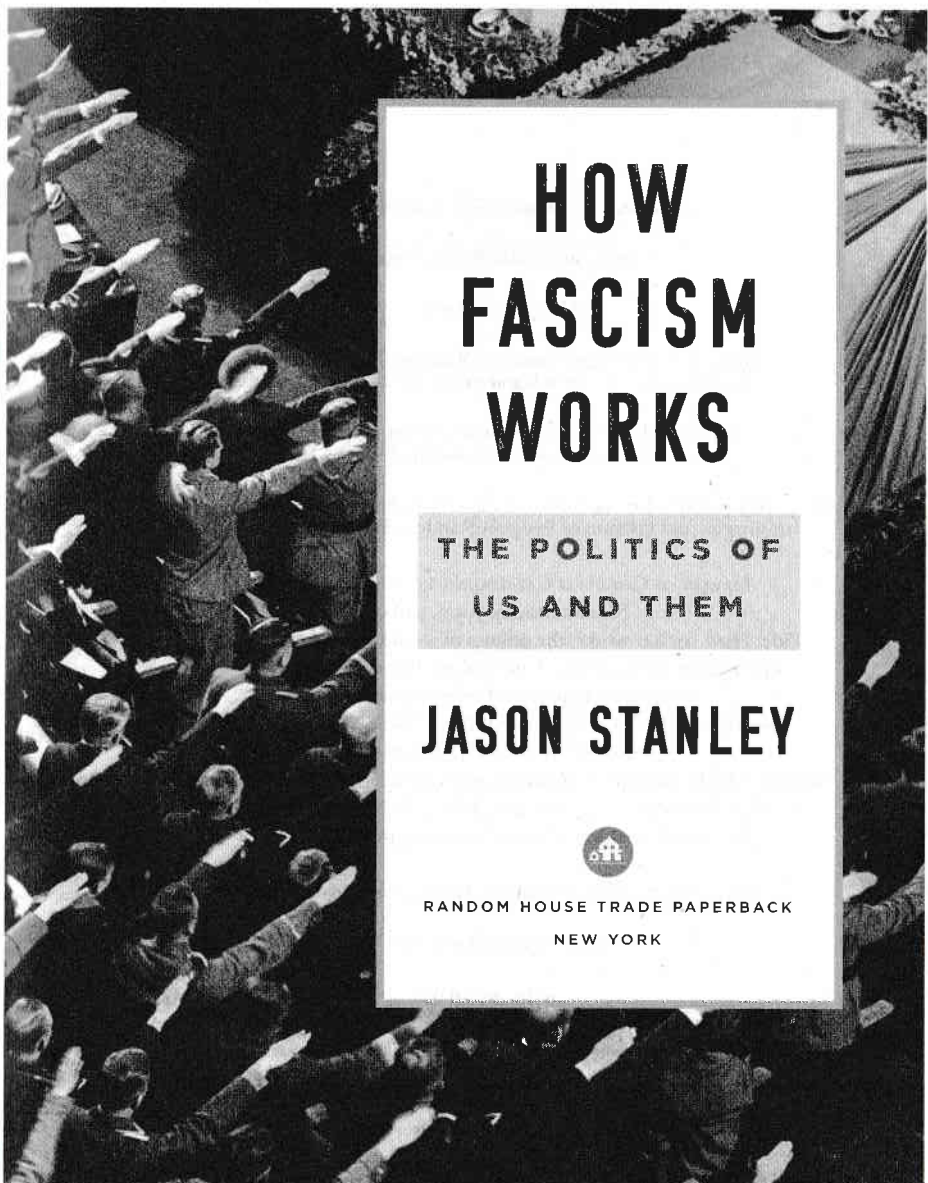


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HOW FASCISM WORKS

THE POLITICS OF
US AND THEM

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HOW FASCISM WORKS

THE MYTHIC PAST

It's in the name of tradition that the anti-Semites base their "point of view." It's in the name of tradition, the long, historical past and the blood ties with Pascal and Descartes, that the Jews are told, you will never belong here.

—Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952)

It is only natural to begin this book where fascist politics invariably claims to discover its genesis: in the past. Fascist politics invokes a pure mythic past tragically destroyed. Depending on how the nation is defined, the mythic past may be religiously pure, racially pure, culturally pure, or all of the above. But there is a common structure to all fascist mythologizing. In all fascist mythic pasts, an extreme version of the patriarchal family reigns supreme, even just a few generations ago. Further back in time, the mythic past was a time of glory of the nation,

with wars of conquest led by patriotic generals, its armies filled with its countrymen, able-bodied, loyal warriors whose wives were at home raising the next generation. In the present, these myths become the basis of the nation's identity under fascist politics.

In the rhetoric of extreme nationalists, such a glorious past has been lost by the humiliation brought on by globalism, liberal cosmopolitanism, and respect for "universal values" such as equality. These values are supposed to have made the nation weak in the face of real and threatening challenges to the nation's existence.

These myths are generally based on fantasies of a non-existent past uniformity, which survives in the traditions of the small towns and countrysides that remain relatively unpolluted by the liberal decadence of the cities. This uniformity—linguistic, religious, geographical, or ethnic—can be perfectly ordinary in some nationalist movements, but fascist myths distinguish themselves with the creation of a glorious national history in which the members of the chosen nation ruled over others, the result of conquests and civilization-building achievements. For example, in the fascist imagination, the past invariably involves traditional, patriarchal gender roles. The fascist mythic past has a particular structure, which supports its authoritarian, hierarchical ideology. That past societies were rarely as patriarchal—or indeed as glorious—as fascist ideology represents them as being is beside the point. This imagined

history provides proof to support the imposition of hierarchy in the present, and it dictates how contemporary society should look and behave.

In a 1922 speech at the Fascist Congress in Naples, Benito Mussolini declared:

We have created our myth. The myth is a faith, a passion. It is not necessary for it to be a reality. . . . Our myth is the nation, our myth is the greatness of the nation! And to this myth, this greatness, which we want to translate into a total reality, we subordinate everything.¹

Here, Mussolini makes clear that the fascist mythic past is *intentionally* mythical. The function of the mythic past, in fascist politics, is to harness the emotion of nostalgia to the central tenets of fascist ideology—authoritarianism, hierarchy, purity, and struggle.

With the creation of a mythic past, fascist politics creates a link between nostalgia and the realization of fascist ideals. German fascists also clearly and explicitly appreciated this point about the strategic use of a mythological past. The leading Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg, editor of the prominent Nazi newspaper the *Völkischer Beobachter*, writes in 1924, "the understanding of and the respect for our own mythological past and our own history will form the first condition for more firmly an-

choring the coming generation in the soil of Europe's original homeland."² The fascist mythic past exists to aid in *changing the present*.

The patriarchal family is one ideal that fascist politicians intend to create in society—or return to, as they claim. The patriarchal family is always represented as a central part of the nation's traditions, diminished, even recently, by the advent of liberalism and cosmopolitanism. But why is patriarchy so strategically central to fascist politics?

In a fascist society, the leader of the nation is analogous to the father in the traditional patriarchal family. The leader is the father of his nation, and his strength and power are the source of his legal authority, just as the strength and power of the father of the family in patriarchy are supposed to be the source of his ultimate moral authority over his children and wife. The leader provides for his nation, just as in the traditional family the father is the provider. The patriarchal father's authority derives from his strength, and strength is the chief authoritarian value. By representing the nation's past as one with a patriarchal family structure, fascist politics connects nostalgia to a central organizing hierarchal authoritarian structure, one that finds its purest representation in these norms.

Gregor Strasser was the National Socialist—Nazi—Reich propaganda chief in the 1920s, before the post was

taken over by Joseph Goebbels. According to Strasser, “for a man, military service is the most profound and valuable form of participation—for the woman it is motherhood!”³ Paula Siber, the acting head of the Association of German Women, in a 1933 document meant to reflect official National Socialist state policy on women, declares that “to be a woman means to be a mother, means affirming with the whole conscious force of one's soul the value of being a mother and making it a law of life . . . the highest calling of the National Socialist woman is not just to bear children, but consciously and out of total devotion to her role and duty as mother to raise children for her people.”⁴ Richard Grunberger, a British historian of National Socialism, sums up “the kernel of Nazi thinking on the women's question” as “a dogma of inequality between the sexes as immutable as that between the races.”⁵ The historian Charu Gupta, in her 1991 article “Politics of Gender: Women in Nazi Germany,” goes as far as to argue that “oppression of women in Nazi Germany in fact furnishes the most extreme case of anti-feminism in the 20th century.”⁶

These ideals of gender roles are defining political movements once again. In 2015, Poland's right-wing party, the Law and Justice Party (in Polish, Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, abbreviated PiS), won an outright majority in Poland's

parliamentary elections, making it Poland's dominant party. PiS, in its current incarnation, has at its center a call to return to the conservative Christian social traditions of rural Poland. Most of its politicians openly abhor homosexuality. It is anti-immigrant, and the European Union has condemned its most antidemocratic measures, such as creating laws allowing government ministers (who are party members) full control of state media by granting them power to fire and hire the broadcasting chiefs of Poland's radio and television stations. But internationally it is best known for its extremism in gender politics. Abortion was already banned in Poland, with exceptions only for severe and irreversible damage to the fetus, for serious risk to the mother, or in the cases of rape or incest. The new bill proposed by PiS would have eliminated rape and incest as exceptions to the ban on abortion, with incarceration as a penalty for women who pursue the procedure. The bill failed to pass only because of a large outcry and demonstrations by women on the streets of Poland's cities.

Similar ideas about gender are on the rise globally, including in the United States, very often supported with reference to history. Andrew Auernheimer, known as weev, is a prominent neo-Nazi who ran the fascist online newspaper *The Daily Stormer* with Andrew Anglin. In May 2017, he published an article in *The Daily Stormer* titled "Just What Are Traditional Gender Roles?" In it,

he claims that women were traditionally regarded as property in all European cultures, except for Jewish societies and some gypsy groups, which were matrilineal:

This was why the Jews were so keen to attack these ideas, because the patrilineal passing of property was innately offensive to their culture. Europe only has this absurd notion of women as independent entities because of organized subversion by agents of Judaism.⁷

According to Weev, echoing twentieth-century Nazism, patriarchal gender roles are central to European history, part of the "glorious past" of white Europe.

In Weev's writing, the past not only supports traditional gender roles but separates groups that are believed to adhere to them from those that don't. From Nazi Germany to more recent history, this vindictive distinction can escalate to the point of genocide. The Hutu power movement was a fascist ethnic supremacist movement that arose in Rwanda in the years before the 1994 Rwandan genocide. In 1990, the Hutu power newspaper *Kangura* published the Hutu Ten Commandments. The first three are about gender. The first declared anyone a traitor who married a Tutsi woman, thereby polluting the pure Hutu bloodline. The third called on Hutu women to ensure that their husbands, brothers, and sons would not marry Tutsi women. The second commandment is:

2. Every Hutu should know that our Hutu daughters are more suitable and conscientious in their role as woman, wife and mother of the family. Are they not beautiful, good secretaries and more honest?

In Hutu power ideology, Hutu women exist only as wives and mothers, entrusted with the sacred responsibility of ensuring Hutu ethnic purity. This pursuit of ethnic purity was a key justification for killing Tutsis in the 1994 genocide.

Of course, gendered language, and references to women's roles and special value, often slip into political speech without much thought to their implication. In the 2016 U.S. election, a video surfaced showing the Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump making harshly demeaning comments about women. Mitt Romney, the Republican Party's 2012 presidential nominee, said that Trump's remarks "demean our wives and daughters." Paul Ryan, the Republican Speaker of the House, said, "women are to be championed and revered, not objectified." Both of these remarks reveal an underlying patriarchal ideology that is typical of much of U.S. Republican Party policy. These politicians could simply have given voice to the most direct description of the facts, which is that Trump's remarks demean half our fellow citizens. Instead, Romney's remark, in language evocative of that used in the Hutu Ten Commandments, describes women

exclusively in terms of traditionally subordinate roles in families, as "wives and daughters"—not even as sisters. Paul Ryan's characterization of women as objects of "reverence" rather than equal respect objectifies women in the same sentence that decries doing so.

The patriarchal family in fascist politics is embedded in a larger narrative about national traditions. Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán was elected to office in 2010. He has overseen the demolition of the liberal institutions of that country in the service of creating what Orbán openly describes as an illiberal state. In April 2011, Orbán oversaw the introduction of "the Fundamental Law of Hungary," Hungary's new constitution. The goal of the Fundamental Law is stated at the outset, in "The National Avowal," which begins by praising the founding of the Hungarian state by Saint Stephen, who "made our country a part of Christian Europe one thousand years ago." The National Avowal continues by expressing pride that "our people has over the centuries defended Europe in a series of struggles" (presumably against the Muslim Ottoman Empire). It recognizes "the role of Christianity in preserving nationhood" and commits "to promoting and safeguarding our heritage." The National Avowal ends by promising to fulfill an "abiding need for spiritual and intellectual renewal" and to provide a way for Hungary's newer generations to "make Hungary great again."

The first series of articles in the Fundamental Law,