

An American Führer? Nazi Analogies and the Struggle to Explain Donald Trump

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ABSTRACT. Ever since Donald Trump announced his candidacy for the US presidency in June 2015, journalists, scholars, and other commentators in the United States have attempted to explain his political success with the aid of historical analogies. In so doing, they have sparked a wider debate about whether the Nazi past helps to make sense of the US present. One group in the debate has contended that Trump's ascent bears a worrisome resemblance to inter-war European fascism, especially the National Socialist movement of Adolf Hitler. By contrast, a second group has rejected this comparison and sought analogies for Trump in other historical figures from European and US history. This article surveys the course, and assesses the results, of the debate from its origins up to the present day. It shows that historians of Germany have played a prominent role in helping to make sense of Trump, but notes that their use of Nazi analogies may be distorting, rather than deepening, our understanding of contemporary political trends. By examining the merits and drawbacks of Nazi analogies in present-day popular discourse, the article recommends that scholars draw on both the German and American historical experience in order to best assess the United States's present political movement.

Seitdem Donald Trump im Juni 2015 seine Bewerbung um das US-Präsidentenamt bekanntgab, haben Journalist*innen, Wissenschaftler*innen und andere Kommentator*innen in den Vereinigten Staaten versucht, seinen politischen Erfolg mit Hilfe historischer Analogien zu erklären. Damit haben sie eine breitere Debatte darüber angestoßen, ob die nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit helfen kann, die US-amerikanische Gegenwart zu deuten. Eine Gruppe hat in dieser Debatte verfochten, dass der Aufstieg Trumps besorgniserregende Ähnlichkeit mit dem europäischen Faschismus der Zwischenkriegszeit aufweise, insbesondere mit der nationalsozialistischen Bewegung Adolf Hitlers. Im Gegensatz dazu hat eine zweite Gruppe diesen Vergleich zurückgewiesen und Analogien zu Trump bei anderen historischen Gestalten aus der Geschichte Europas und der Vereinigten Staaten gesucht. Dieser Beitrag verfolgt den Verlauf dieser Debatte und bewertet ihre Ergebnisse von ihren Anfängen bis heute. Er zeigt, dass zu Deutschland arbeitende Historiker*innen bei der Einschätzung Trumps eine prominente Rolle gespielt haben, weist aber darauf hin, dass deren Gebrauch von Analogien mit dem Nationalsozialismus unser Verständnis gegenwärtiger politischer Trends möglicherweise eher verzerrt als vertieft. Indem er die Vorzüge und die Nachteile des Nazi-Vergleichs im heutigen populären Diskurs untersucht, empfiehlt er, dass Wissenschaftler*innen sowohl deutsche als auch amerikanische historische Erfahrungen heranziehen sollten, um den gegenwärtigen politischen Moment der USA möglichst gut einschätzen zu können.

IT has been nearly seventy-five years since the death of Adolf Hitler, and the Nazi Führer has never been more alive. The rise of right-wing political movements across the Western world has raised concerns among observers in Europe and North America that the specter of Nazism, once thought consigned to the past, has reemerged in the present. These fears have been especially acute in the United States. Ever since Donald Trump first announced

his candidacy for the presidency in June 2015—and especially since his Electoral College victory in 2016—journalists, scholars, and other commentators have flooded the American media with op-eds, articles, and books trying to make sense of his unexpected political success.¹ In pursuing this task, observers have proposed a wide range of historical analogies to explain the Trump phenomenon. Not surprisingly, they have disagreed profoundly on which comparisons are the most suitable. One group has contended that Trump's political triumph bears a worrisome resemblance to interwar European fascism, especially the National Socialist movement of Adolf Hitler. By contrast, a second group has rejected this comparison and sought analogies for Trump in other historical figures from European and US history. The debate has raged across the popular media and academia for the better part of four years. Yet although countless commentators have participated in the discussion, few have surveyed its course or assessed its results.²

This article seeks to rectify this oversight by providing a comprehensive analysis of the debate from its origins up to the present day. Undertaking this task is especially timely. Although the debate is ongoing, it has lasted long enough and left a sufficiently long paper trail to permit an analytical assessment of its key features. Undertaking such an analysis is also timely in light of the likelihood that the debate has peaked. Although it may seem counterintuitive given the continuing ubiquity of Nazi comparisons in present-day American political discourse, there is evidence that we may have passed the debate's apex. For one thing, the number of newspaper and journal articles employing Trump/Hitler comparisons in the English language press has declined since reaching a high point in 2017; indeed, there has been a yearly average decline of around 20 percent over the past two years.³ Secondly, there has also been a decline in the popularity of keyword searches on Google relating to "Trump and Hitler" from a high point (between the summer of 2015 and summer of 2017) and the present day.⁴

There are several possible reasons for this surprising decline. One is the Democratic Party's taking back of the US House of Representatives in the midterm elections of November 2018. Thanks to the checks placed on Trump's control over the federal government, some of the fears that originally generated Nazi analogies have begun to ebb. Also playing a role is the much-noted phenomenon of "normalization."⁵ Although the undeniable shock caused by Trump's electoral success fueled many of the initial Nazi comparisons, the gradual acclimatization of people to the "new normal" of daily life in the Trump era may explain why such comparisons have declined.

¹This article draws mostly on sources from the United States, Great Britain, and Canada, with some additional material from the mass media in Germany and Israel.

²Daniel Bessner, "The Ghosts of Weimar: The Weimar Analogy in American Thought," *Social Research* 4 (2017): 831–55; Jane Caplan, "Donald Trump: Between Election and Inauguration," *History Workshop* 83 (2017): 1–9.

³A database search on the Fairfield University Library website revealed a 19.5 percent decline in the total number of newspaper articles featuring the keywords "Donald Trump Adolf Hitler," published between 2017 and 2018 (from 3,048 to 2,452 articles). A related search in the same period featuring the keywords "Hitler Trump" revealed a decline of 22.7 percent in the number of articles (from 701 to 542 articles). There was a similar rate of decrease from 2018 to 2019.

⁴Google searches for the keywords "Trump" and "Hitler" were at their highest in the months between the fall of 2015 and February/March of 2016, and searches for "Trump" and "Fascism" peaked between Trump's election and his inauguration. See Google Trends.

⁵See, for example, Matt Lewis, "We Have Finally Normalized Trumpism," *The Daily Beast*, February 26, 2019 (<https://www.thedailybeast.com/we-have-finally-normalized-trumpism>).

None of this is meant to minimize the seriousness of the US's right-wing turn. As Trump continues to violate democratic political norms, and as instances of right-wing extremist violence continue to erupt, concerns over the future of US democracy remain high. Comparisons with the Nazi past thus remain more relevant than ever. That said, the likelihood that the debate has crested provides us with the opportunity to analyze it more objectively and determine the lessons it provides for the future.

Doing so is especially important for scholars in the field of German studies. Since the beginning of the debate in 2015, Germanists in history, political science, and cultural studies have played a prominent role in advancing the discussion about how to make sense of Trump. German historians, in particular, have enjoyed new opportunities to publish their views in the mainstream press and bring their expertise to a mass audience. All of these developments are to be welcomed. Yet with these new opportunities come certain risks. Although scholars of German history have been able to highlight the lessons of the Nazi past for the American present, they also run the risk of viewing the latter too much through the prism of the former. Since 1945, German historians have consistently stressed the importance of historical memory and admonished others about the perils of forgetting the "lessons of history." Yet, while one may embrace George Santayana's claim that "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it," one must be careful not to lose sight of Otto Friedrich's retort that "those who cannot forget the past are condemned to misunderstand it."⁶ Determining how to balance these two competing insights—about the relative perils of "too little" and "too much" memory—has never been more important. Major questions remain to be answered: To what degree might US-American historians of Germany not only be deepening, but also distorting, our understanding of present-day political trends through Nazi analogies? To what degree might the imperatives of historical memory be compromising our understanding of contemporary history? By analyzing how the Nazi past has been used to explain Donald Trump, we can better understand the merits and drawbacks of historical analogies and employ them more responsibly as we move forward.

Comparing Trump and Hitler: The Debate

The debate about the comparability of Donald Trump and Adolf Hitler has had two major phases. The first erupted in the period between Trump's announcement of his candidacy in June 2015 and electoral triumph in November 2016; the second spanned the period between his inauguration in January 2017 and the midterm elections of November 2018. During these respective "movement" and "regime" phases of Trumpism, commentators made comparisons to the Nazi era on countless occasions. Most appeared after Trump uttered controversial remarks or proposed controversial policies relating to immigration, border security, freedom of the press, judicial independence, executive power, race relations, and national identity. The comparisons have taken different forms and served different goals. Some have been highly rhetorical and intended to discredit Trump's presidential bid and subsequent administration; others have been more analytical and sought to determine what kind of political phenomenon the Republican Party nominee and eventual president represented. Both types of comparisons have coexisted with each other up to the present day. In pursuing

⁶Otto Friedrich, *Before the Deluge: A Portrait of Berlin in the 1920s* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), xxi.

this dual rhetorical and interpretive task, scholars, journalists, and other commentators have arrived at different conclusions. One camp has embraced the alarmist position that Trump represents something of a latter-day Hitler. A second camp, by contrast, has taken what they regard as a more realistic stance and compared Trump to a range of other historical figures.

The Alarmists: Interpreting Trump as Hitler

Many observers warned that Donald Trump bore frightening similarities to Adolf Hitler. These critics advanced their claim with arguments that varied considerably in stridency. At one extreme, some argued that Trump was literally like Hitler. Others conceded that he was different from Hitler, but was behaving like him. Still others deferred the threat to the future and worried that Trump might one day develop into a Hitler-like figure. Taking a slightly more moderate position, some observers conceded that Trump might not be an outright Nazi, but argued that he was a fascist. Others conceded that Trump might not display the classic traits of European fascism, but could be seen as a distinctly American kind of fascist. Others admitted that Trump might not be an actual fascist, but warned that many of his supporters embraced fascist ideas. Finally, some commentators stressed that regardless of whether Trump was an actual fascist, the United States remained vulnerable to fascism because it shared many of the weaknesses of the Weimar Republic. This diverse range of comparisons was a key part of the alarmist camp's rhetorical strategy for advancing its agenda. While alarmists sought to draw attention to Trump as a political threat, they recognized that employing overly hyperbolic comparisons would violate the boundaries of responsible political discourse and detract from the seriousness of the alarmists' case. Qualifying the ways in which Trump allegedly resembled Hitler thus enabled the alarmists to enhance their arguments' respectability in the court of public opinion.

Trump Is Hitler

The most vocal critics of Trump compared him directly to Hitler. This charge first appeared in late 2015, after the presidential candidate responded to a series of deadly Islamist terror attacks in Paris (November 13) and San Bernardino, California (December 2), by demanding that foreign Muslims be banned from traveling to the United States. Politicians were among the first commentators to condemn Trump's remarks by invoking Hitler. The former Republican governor of New Jersey, Christine Todd Whitman, rejected Trump's comments as "the kind of rhetoric that allowed Hitler to move forward," while the Mayor of Philadelphia, Michael Nutter, said Trump had "taken a page from the playbook of Hitler."⁷ Several months later, two former Mexican presidents echoed these comments: in February 2016, Vicente Fox responded to Trump's crude criticism of Latino immigrants by saying he "reminds me of Hitler," while his successor, Felipe Calderon, accused Trump of "exploiting [popular] feelings like Hitler did in his time."⁸ Similar comparisons flooded the mass media and popular culture. Already in the summer of 2015, journalists

⁷Alexandra Sims, "Donald Trump Compared to Adolf Hitler After 'Complete Shutdown of Muslims' Comments," *The Independent* (UK), December 10, 2015 (<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-elections/donald-trump-compared-to-adolf-hitler-after-complete-shutdown-of-muslims-comments-a6767941.html>).

⁸Martin Farrer, "Two Former Mexican Presidents Compare Donald Trump to Hitler," *The Guardian*, February 27, 2016.

unearthed a 1990 *Vanity Fair* story in which Trump's ex-wife, Ivana, reported that her husband kept a book of Hitler speeches in a cabinet near his bed.⁹ Other reporters discovered the disturbing fact that Trump's signature phrase, "Make America Great Again," resembled Hitler's slogan, "Make Germany Great Again."¹⁰ Trump's alleged similarity to Hitler also found expression in political cartoons and comments by comedians, such as Bill Maher, Sarah Silverman, and Louis C. K., who told the *New York Daily News*: "It was funny for a little while. But the guy is Hitler."¹¹ The fact that, in December 2015, Trump publicly declared that he was not bothered by Hitler comparisons did little to disabuse critics that the two men were similar.¹²

Such comparisons have continued up until the present day. In many cases, commentators who initially hesitated to identify similarities between Trump and Hitler eventually changed their minds and did so. To cite merely one of the most recent examples, in late June 2019, journalist Lucian K. Truscott IV asserted that, despite his early "skepticism" about the suitability of Nazi analogies, the alleged existence of "concentration camps" on the US-Mexico border finally convinced him that "this is the week that it became accurate to compare Trump to Hitler."¹³

Trump Is Not Hitler, but Is Behaving Like Hitler

By contrast, other commentators dismissed the idea that Trump was Hitler, but affirmed that he was behaving like him. In doing so, they sidestepped the potential charge of making a reckless comparison by placing it into more acceptable packaging. Critics of Trump increasingly used this rhetorical bait-and-switch after he became the Republican Party nominee and headed into the general election. Some focused on his aggressive demonization of minorities. In October 2016, journalist William Saletan admitted that "Trump isn't Hitler," but insisted that the candidate's blaming "of Muslim Americans ... for domestic terrorism" made him "sound ... like Hitler."¹⁴ Other critics echoed the claim of Anne Frank's stepsister, Eva Schloss, who told *Newsweek* in January 2016 that Trump was "acting like another Hitler" because of his demagoguery.¹⁵ Communications scholar Nicholas O'Shaughnessy repudi-

⁹The original story was Marie Brenner's "After the Gold Rush," *Vanity Fair*, September 1990. See also Rachel X. Landes, "Did Donald Trump Keep Hitler Speeches by His Bed?," *The Forward*, August 6, 2015.

¹⁰See "Hitler and Trump: Common Slogans," at the fact-checking website *Snopes*, March 4, 2016 (<https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/make-germany-great-again/>).

¹¹For cartoons: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/opinions/wp/2015/12/08/donald-trump-is-running-out-of-ways-to-outdo-himself/?utm_term=.545e1a2cb05f&wpisrc=nl_opinions&wppmm=1 and <http://editorialcartoonists.com/cartoon/display.cfm/146557/>. For comedians: Peter Stevenson, "The Hitler-ification of Donald Trump," *Washington Post*, March 7, 2016; "Sarah Silverman Dresses as Hitler on 'Conan,' Jokes Donald Trump Comparisons," *The Hollywood Reporter*, March 10, 2016.

¹²Jenna Johnson, "Donald Trump Says He Is Not Bothered by Comparisons to Hitler," *Washington Post*, December 8, 2015.

¹³Lucian K. Truscott IV, "This Is the Week That It Became Accurate to Compare Trump to Hitler," *Salon*, June 29, 2019 (<https://www.salon.com/2019/06/29/this-is-the-week-it-became-accurate-to-compare-trump-to-hitler/>).

¹⁴William Saletan, "Springtime for Donald," *Slate*, October 14, 2016 (<https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2016/10/nobodys-like-hitler-but-trump-is-getting-closer.html>). See also Max Boot, "The Nazi Echoes in Trump's Tweets," *Los Angeles Times*, October 17, 2016.

¹⁵Eva Schloss, "Anne Frank's Stepsister: 'Donald Trump Is Acting Like Hitler,'" *Newsweek*, January 27, 2016 (<https://www.newsweek.com/holocaust-memorial-day-anne-frank-refugee-crisis-donald-trump-420312>).

ated any direct comparison between Trump and Hitler, but argued that both men used “bullying, bellicose” rhetoric to manipulate audiences through “maneuvers, panaceas, and fraud.”¹⁶ Other observers focused on Trump and Hitler’s shared personality traits. Writer and former US congressional staffer Mike Lofgren said that both men were “egomaniacal narcissist[s]”; journalist Volker Ullrich argued that they shared “an inclination to mix lies with truth”; and journalist Peter Ross Range observed they suffered from a “messianic complex.”¹⁷

Similar criticisms were voiced after Trump’s election. Many commentators fretted about the new president’s assault against journalistic truth. In the fall of 2017, columnist Jeff Nesbit said that Trump’s charge that journalists were spreading “fake news” resembled one of “the most effective moves that allowed Hitler’s rise [to power].”¹⁸ Other observers added that Trump’s critique of the media was hypocritical. As *New York Times* writer Charles Blow put it, Trump was less like “Hitler the murderer, ... than Hitler the liar” for the ways in which the president had “manipulated the American people with outrageous lies stacked one on top of the other.”¹⁹ Trump’s expert use of social media, according to some commentators, resembled Hitler’s own manipulation of the press in the early 1930s; both were marked by fact-free kind of “branding, merchandising, and showmanship.”²⁰ Other critics attacked the president’s draconian approach to immigration by comparing it to the Nazis’ persecution of the Jews during the 1930s. In September 2018, historian Richard Frankel condemned Trump’s decision to cease issuing passports to certain Hispanic Americans by comparing the policy to the Nuremberg Laws, saying they resembled “Hitler’s efforts to remove the Jews from the German national community.”²¹ In response to the new family separation policies at the US–Mexico border in the summer of 2018, journalist Adam Roy angrily wrote, “Yes, You should be comparing Trump to Hitler,” while former NSA director Michael Hayden tweeted a photograph of Auschwitz–Birkenau accompanied by the caption “Other governments have separated mothers and children.”²² These attacks found a mass audience with Michael Moore’s 2018 popular film, *Fahrenheit 11/9*, which devoted nearly ten minutes of its two-hour narrative to itemizing the ways in which Trump resembled Hitler.

¹⁶Nicholas O’Shaughnessy, “The Führer and the Donald,” *History News Network*, October 2, 2016 (<https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/163943>).

¹⁷Mike Lofgren, “Trump, Reagan and Fascism: Frank Rich and the Pitfalls of Historical Analogy,” *Truthout*, June 17, 2016 (<https://truthout.org/articles/trump-reagan-and-fascism-frank-rich-and-the-pitfalls-of-historical-analogy/>); Volker Ullrich, cited in Isabel Best, “Should We Even Go There? Historians on Comparing Fascism to Trumpism,” *The Guardian*, December 1, 2016 (<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/dec/01/comparing-fascism-donald-trump-historians-trumpism>); Peter Ross Range, “The Theory of Political Leadership That Donald Trump Shares with Adolf Hitler,” *Washington Post*, July 25, 2016.

¹⁸Jeff Nesbit, “History Repeats,” *US News*, October 26, 2017 (<https://www.usnews.com/news/at-the-edge/articles/2017-10-26/trump-propaganda-and-the-destruction-of-the-free-press>).

¹⁹Charles Blow, “Trump Isn’t Hitler. But the Lying ...” *New York Times*, October 19, 2017 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/19/opinion/trump-isnt-hitler-but-the-lying.html>).

²⁰Andrew O’Hehir, “How They Made Germany Great Again,” *Salon*, March 31, 2018 (<https://www.salon.com/2018/03/31/how-they-made-germany-great-again-the-nazi-social-media-campaign-of-1932/>).

²¹Richard Frankel, “Donald Trump’s Latest Immigration Outrage,” *History News Network*, September 4, 2018 (<https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/169900>).

²²Adam Roy, “Yes, You Should Be Comparing Trump to Hitler,” *The Forward*, June 19, 2018 (<https://forward.com/opinion/403515/yes-you-should-be-comparing-trump-to-hitler/>).

Trump Is Not Hitler, but Could Become Hitler

Other commentators suggested that Trump's resemblance to Hitler was merely a future possibility. In September 2016, Michiko Kakutani published a prominent *New York Times* review of Volker Ullrich's book, *Hitler: Ascent, 1889–1939*, in which she compared Hitler and Trump without invoking the latter's actual name. In describing Hitler as a "big mouth" with a "fondness for superlatives," Kakutani not only evoked Trump, but signaled the possibility of future peril by noting that the Nazi leader's "ascent might have been derailed" at "numerous points," but had been prevented by people who "dismissed him as a celebrity."²³ Two months later, after Trump's election, historian Timothy Snyder adopted a similar strategy in a *Slate* article entitled "Him," which, without mentioning either Hitler or Trump by name, surveyed the rise and fall of the former to warn of the danger posed by the latter, implying that the "surprise" election of both men set the stage for the emergence of a "one party state."²⁴ Other critics were more explicit in forecasting future dangers. Already before Trump's election, journalist Robert Dreyfuss in *The Nation* imagined a future nightmare in which Trump mobilized gun rights supporters into a popular militia, known as the "Trump Second Amendment Society" (abbreviated as the "Trump SA"), which could function as the equivalent of the notorious Nazi paramilitary force of the same name.²⁵ Following Trump's election, journalist Paul Waldman conceded that Trump was not Hitler, but in an article entitled "Beware Trump's Reichstag Fire" warned that he could behave exactly like him in the event of a national emergency.²⁶ Other critics pointed out that because Hitler's worst crimes began "incrementally," it was important to guard against patterns of behavior that signaled worse misdeeds to come.²⁷ These observers invoked admonitory metaphors such as "death by a thousand cuts" and "boiling a frog to death one degree at a time" to remind people that fascism gained control by stealth and warned that "the Holocaust did not begin with gas chambers ... but with words."²⁸ These realities enabled concerned critics to claim—as philosopher Cornel West did in July of 2019—that Trump was "becoming the American version of ... Hitler."²⁹

²³Michiko Kakutani, "In 'Hitler,' An Ascent from 'Dunderhead' to Demagogue," *New York Times* (<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/28/books/hitler-ascent-volker-ullrich.html>).

²⁴Timothy Snyder, "Him," *Slate*, November 18, 2016 (<https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2016/11/his-election-that-november-came-as-a-surprise.html>).

²⁵Robert Dreyfuss, "It Can't Happen Here—Can It?," *The Nation*, March 13, 2016 (<https://www.unz.com/article/it-cant-happen-here-can-it/>).

²⁶Paul Waldman, "Beware Trump's Reichstag Fire," *The Week*, February 7, 2017 (<https://theweek.com/articles/678364/beware-trumps-reichstag-fire>).

²⁷Waitman Beorn, "It's Not Wrong to Compare Trump's America to the Holocaust," *Washington Post*, July 16, 2018 (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/posteverything/wp/2018/07/16/its-not-wrong-to-compare-trumps-america-to-the-holocaust-heres-why/?utm_term=.b548ab3f5a7a).

²⁸John Whitehead, "Stay Alert America: The Worst Is Yet to Come," *Huffington Post*, November 15, 2016 (https://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-w-whitehead/stay-alert-america-the-worst_b_12985752.html); David Neiwert, "Donald Trump May Not Be a Fascist, But He Is Leading Us Merrily Down That Path," *Huffington Post*, January 14, 2016 (https://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-neiwert/trump-may-not-be-a-fascist-but_b_8973768.html); Nalina Eggert, "What Made Trump's Remarks So Offensive?," *BBC News*, August 16, 2017 (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-40948812>).

²⁹Cited on Anderson Cooper's Twitter Feed, July 19, 2019: <https://twitter.com/AC360/status/1152382339235733504>.

Trump Is a Fascist

Other critics refrained from describing Trump as Hitler and instead called him a fascist. As with early Hitler comparisons, the initial claims that Trump was a fascist were mostly rhetorical. Following the July 2015 assertions by journalists Jeffrey Tucker and Conor Lynch that Trump was “an actual fascist,” a wave of similar comments hit the mainstream press in November, after the Republican Party candidate proposed his controversial Muslim ban.³⁰ The comments were bipartisan. Conservative journalists and politicians, including Max Boot, Bret Stephens, John Noonan, former Virginia governor Jim Gilmore, and Libertarian presidential candidate Gary Johnson, claimed that Trump was a fascist.³¹ Summing up the conservative consensus was Robert Kagan, who said “the phenomenon Trump has created has become something ... that has usually been called fascism, where a strong leader takes over and undermines democracy.”³² Left-liberals made similar claims. In December 2015, former Maryland governor Martin O’Malley called Trump a “fascist demagogue,” and several months later, former Labor Secretary under President Clinton, Robert Reich, wrote that Trump was a fascist because he “incited violence.”³³

Following these largely rhetorical comments, other observers took a more systematic approach in identifying Trump as a fascist. As the electoral campaign rolled on into 2016, academics led the effort to determine the extent to which the Republican Party nominee displayed fascist attributes. In one of the earliest efforts, historian Richard Steigmann-Gall asserted that Trump’s campaign was exploiting the same “mobilizing passions” that originally fueled fascism, including a sense of crisis, commitment to collectivism, sense of victimization, embrace of autocratic leadership, and acceptance of violence.³⁴ Similar typological analyses appeared after Trump’s election. The day following Trump’s victory, political scientist Matthew Filner lamented that “the United States did the unthinkable ... we elected a fascist” and noted how Trump’s fixation on national decline and rebirth duplicated fascism’s

³⁰Jeffrey Tucker, “Is Donald Trump a Fascist?,” *Newsweek*, July 17, 2015 (<https://www.newsweek.com/donald-trump-fascist-354690>); Conor Lynch, “Donald Trump Is an Actual Fascist,” *Salon*, July 25, 2015 (https://www.salon.com/2015/07/25/donald_trump_is_an_actual_fascist_what_his_surging_popularity_says_about_the_gop_base/).

³¹Boot’s and Stephens’s comments are quoted in Max Ehrenfreund, “Why You Should Stop Calling Trump a Fascist,” *Washington Post*, December 4, 2015 (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/12/04/why-you-should-stop-calling-donald-trump-a-fascist/?utm_term=.3924df668a45); David Horsey, “Donald Trump’s Fascist Inclinations Do Not Bother His Fans,” *Baltimore Sun*, December 15, 2015 (<https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/opinion/bal-donald-trumps-fascist-inclinations-do-not-bother-his-fans-20151214-story.html>); Janelle Bouie, “Donald Trump Is a Fascist,” *Slate*, November 25, 2015 (<https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2015/11/donald-trump-is-a-fascist-it-is-the-political-label-that-best-describes-the-gop-front-runner.html>); Tyler Pager, “Gary Johnson: Trump Is a Fascist,” *Politico*, August 23, 2016 (<https://www.politico.com/story/2016/08/gary-johnson-trump-fascist-227339>).

³²Robert Kagan, “This Is How Fascism Comes to America,” *Washington Post*, May 18, 2016 (https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/this-is-how-fascism-comes-to-america/2016/05/17/c4e32c58-1c47-11e6-8c7b-6931e66333e7_story.html?utm_term=.65fc87952a44).

³³Maxwell Tani, “Presidential Candidate Martin O’Malley: Donald Trump Is a ‘Fascist Demagogue,’” *Business Insider*, December 7, 2015 (<https://www.businessinsider.com/donald-trump-muslim-ban-omalley-2015-12>); Robert Reich, “The Many Ways Trump Is a Fascist,” *Chicago Sun Times*, March 19, 2016 (<https://chicago.suntimes.com/opinion/robert-reich-the-many-ways-donald-trump-is-a-fascist/>).

³⁴Richard Steigmann-Gall, “One Expert Says Yes, Donald Trump Is a Fascist. And It’s Not Just Trump,” *Huffington Post*, July 18, 2016 (https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/one-expert-says-yes-donald-trump-is-a-fascist-and_us_578d1a56e4b0d4229484d3e0).

“mythic core.”³⁵ In early 2017, Timothy Snyder provided an implicit reflection on the Trump phenomenon in his best-selling book, *On Tyranny*, which, while not mentioning Trump directly, warned about the fascist threat he posed. As Snyder explained in a May 2017 interview, Trump’s “straight-on confrontation with the truth” and “attempt to undo ... institutions” both amounted to “fascism.”³⁶ Around the same time, political scientist Jason Stanley’s book, *How Fascism Works* (2018), argued that Trump employed “fascist techniques to excite his base and erode liberal democratic institutions.”³⁷ Finally, former Secretary of State Madeline Albright’s book, *Fascism: A Warning* (2018), implied that Trump was a fascist based on his behavior as a “bully.”³⁸

Claims that Trump was a fascist did not remain restricted to academic studies but continued to circulate in public discourse. The most notable flurry erupted in the summer of 2019, when Democratic New York congressional representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez tweeted that the Trump administration had set up “concentration camps” on the US-Mexico border. When Trump replied that Ocasio-Cortez and her allies in the so-called “Squad” (most notably, Representative Ilhan Omar) should “go back where they came from,” Omar vehemently responded, “I believe he is a fascist.”³⁹ When Trump supporters at a North Carolina rally that same month chanted the threatening phrase “send her back,” historian Ruth Ben-Ghiat said she was reminded of the “leader-follower” dynamic of fascist rallies, while journalist Masha Gessen characterized Trump’s “war on immigrants” as “the legalized veneer of fascism.”⁴⁰ Jason Stanley, meanwhile, tweeted that the time had come “stop being equivocal” and declared outright that “Trump is a fascist.”⁴¹

Trump Might Be a Fascist without Appearing to Be Fascist

These confident assessments notwithstanding, other observers recognized that because Trump did not display certain fascist traits, other ways of categorizing him as such had

³⁵Matthew Filner, “American Fascism,” *Public Seminar*, November 10, 2016 (<http://www.publicseminar.org/2016/11/american-fascism/>).

³⁶Chauncey Devega, “Historian Timothy Snyder: ‘It’s Pretty Much Inevitable’ That Trump Will Try to Stage a Coup and Overthrow Democracy,” *Salon*, May 1, 2017 (<https://www.salon.com/2017/05/01/historian-timothy-snyder-its-pretty-much-inevitable-that-trump-will-try-to-stage-a-coup-and-overthrow-democracy/>).

³⁷See the remarks in the interview “How Fascism Works,” *Vox*, December 15, 2018 (<https://www.vox.com/2018/9/19/17847110/how-fascism-works-donald-trump-jason-stanley>).

³⁸Madeline Albright, *Fascism: A Warning* (New York: Harper, 2018), 209. “If we think of fascism as a wound from the past that had almost healed, putting Trump in the White House was like ripping off the bandage and picking at the scab.” Also see Michelle Goldberg, “Madeline Albright Is Worried. We Should Be Too,” *New York Times*, April 13, 2018 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/13/opinion/madeleine-albright-worried-trump.html>).

³⁹Maanvi Singh, “Ilhan Omar on Trump: ‘I Believe He Is a Fascist’—As It Happened,” *The Guardian*, July 18, 2019 (<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/live/2019/jul/18/trump-ilhan-omar-news-today-live-send-her-back-racist-rally-chant-latest-updates>).

⁴⁰Ruth Ben-Ghiat, “‘Send Her Back,’ and the Advancement of Trump’s Authoritarian Playbook,” *GQ*, July 19, 2019 (<https://www.gq.com/story/send-her-back-trump-authoritarian-playbook>); Masha Gessen, “The Weaponization of National Belonging from Nazi Germany to Trump,” *New Yorker*, July 21, 2019 (<https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/the-weaponization-of-national-belonging-from-nazi-germany-to-trump>). See also Jason Stanley, “Yes, ‘Send Her Back’ Is the Face of Evil,” *Newsweek*, July 21, 2019 (<https://www.newsweek.com/yes-send-her-back-face-evil-know-fascism-when-i-see-it-opinion-1450243>).

⁴¹Jason Stanley tweet, July 23, 2019 (<https://twitter.com/jasoninrator/status/1153759025596719104>).

to be employed. Many commentators shared Robert Dreyfuss's assertion that a potential "American style fascist movement would hardly be a precise copy of either the German or the Italian model" and cited the warnings of American writers from the 1930s, such as Dorothy Thompson and Sinclair Lewis, that if fascism were ever to manifest itself in the United States, it would be marked by indigenous rather than foreign features.⁴² As historian Robert Paxton put it, there would be "no swastikas in an American fascism but Stars and Stripes ... No fascist salute, but mass recitations of the pledge of allegiance."⁴³ An American fascist leader, historian Robert Kagan added, would probably be a "television huckster" or a "phony billionaire."⁴⁴ As writer and former congressional staffer Mike Lofgren put it, he would be "less Horst Wessel and more Lee Greenwood."⁴⁵ Finally, historian Simon Schama drew on Umberto Eco's influential 1995 idea of "Ur-Fascism" and argued that because fascism could "come back in the most innocent of guises," such as "TV or Internet populism," Trump could be defined as an "entertainment fascist."⁴⁶

Trump Is Not a Fascist, but Many of His Supporters Are

Other commentators argued that although Trump might not be a fascist, many of his supporters were. Not long after he announced he was running for president in the summer of 2015, right-wing extremists enthusiastically greeted Trump's candidacy. The most notorious were Ku Klux Klan (KKK) leader David Duke, who endorsed him in August 2015, and so-called alt-right figures, such as white nationalist Richard Spencer and neo-Nazi Andrew Anglin, who ostentatiously celebrated Trump's election as a victory for their movement.⁴⁷ Around the same time, Trump sent numerous "dog whistles" welcoming these right-wing endorsements. He refused to disavow Duke's support, retweeted right-wing comments from neo-Nazi sites, disseminated anti-Semitic imagery attacking Hillary Clinton and prominent Jewish Democrats, and refused to criticize antisemitic trolling attacks against Jewish journalists.⁴⁸ In response to these gestures, commentators drew predictable conclusions. In May 2016, historian Mark Byrnes declared that Trump was stoking

⁴²Dreyfuss, "It Can't Happen Here—Can It?" See also John Broich, "Normalizing Fascists," *The Conversation*, December 11, 2016.

⁴³Robert Paxton, "The Future of Fascism," *Slate*, April 6, 2017 (<https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2017/04/fascism-didnt-die-in-1945-it-evolved-and-took-new-form.html>).

⁴⁴Kagan, "This Is How Fascism Comes to America."

⁴⁵Mike Lofgren, "Trump, Reagan and Fascism."

⁴⁶Schama is quoted in Isabel Best, "Should We Even Go There?"

⁴⁷Jeremy Diamond, "David Duke on Trump: 'He's the Best of the Lot,'" *CNN*, August 25, 2015 (<https://www.cnn.com/2015/08/25/politics/david-duke-donald-trump-immigration/>); Daniel Lombroso and Yoni Appelbaum, "'Hail Trump': White Nationalists Salute the President-Elect," *The Atlantic*, November 21, 2016 (<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/11/richard-spencer-speech-npi/508379/>); Jessica Reaves, "White Supremacists Celebrate Trump's Victory," *ADL Blog*, November 10, 2016 (<https://www.adl.org/blog/white-supremacists-celebrate-trumps-victory>).

⁴⁸Uriel Heilman, "Seven Anti-Semitism Controversies Surrounding Donald Trump," *Haaretz*, June 2, 2016 (<https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/donald-trump-s-anti-semitism-controversies-1.5390934>); Lana Adler, "Ten Antisemitic Tweets That Prove Trump's Dog Whistling Is Real," *Forward*, October 10, 2016 (<https://forward.com/schmooze/351765/think-trumps-debate-dog-whistle-went-unheard-check-out-10-debate-tweets/>); Sandy Goodman, "Is Donald Trump an Antisemite? Look at the Record," *Huffington Post*, February 28, 2017 (https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/is-trump-an-anti-semite-you-bet-he-is_us_58b511cfe4b0658fc20f99ba).

“latent fascist impulses in American society” as long as they “serve his interest.”⁴⁹ Other scholars argued that Trump’s social base of support was comparable to that of classical fascist parties. In July 2016, German studies scholar James Skidmore said that Trump’s supporters resembled Hitler’s; both were “angry and frustrated” people who felt “threatened by a world that is changing in ways they don’t understand.”⁵⁰ A few months later, journalist William Saletan argued that Trump’s references to “sinister elite[s]” promised to “pave ... the way for his movement to become more openly antisemitic.”⁵¹

These fears intensified after Trump took office. Critics were scandalized when he appointed the Mussolini-admiring Steve Bannon as his chief strategist and were horrified when Trump responded to the violent clashes between right-wing extremists and counter-protesters in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August 2017 by remarking that there were “very fine people on both sides.”⁵² This response prompted critics to redouble their insistence that the president had a soft spot for his fascist supporters. As historian Katherine Pickering Antonova argued, Trump’s failure to “unequivocally denounce the terrorists or fire the members of his administration who are sympathetic to white nationalism” revealed “that fascism lives among us.”⁵³ Similar comments were made in the months that followed. During the family separation controversy at the US–Mexico border in June 2018, MSNBC commentator Donny Deutsch bitterly condemned Trump supporters by saying, “If you vote for Trump, then you ... are standing at the border, like Nazis, going: ‘you here, you here.’”⁵⁴ Two months later, journalist Jonathan Chait declared that although Trump was “not a Nazi or a fascist,” he had “drawn Nazis into the periphery of his coalition.”⁵⁵ Finally, in the summer of 2019, *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman countered conservative claims that the Democratic Party was increasingly embracing “socialism” by asserting that there was far more evidence that the Republican Party was “a party of fascists.”⁵⁶

America Is Comparable to Weimar Germany

Still other commentators feared that the United States was beginning to resemble the Weimar Republic and becoming vulnerable to a fascist takeover. In December 2015,

⁴⁹Mark Byrnes, “Trump Isn’t a Fascist,” *History News Network*, May 24, 2016 (<https://historynewsnetwork.org/blog/153772>).

⁵⁰James Skidmore, “Trump Isn’t Hitler,” *National Post*, July 6, 2016 (<https://nationalpost.com/opinion/james-skidmore-trump-isnt-hitler-but-his-supporters-have-much-in-common-with-those-who-voted-in-the-nazis>).

⁵¹William Saletan, “Springtime for Donald.”

⁵²Rosie Gray, “Trump Defends White-Nationalist Protesters,” *The Atlantic*, August 15, 2017 (<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/08/trump-defends-white-nationalist-protesters-some-very-fine-people-on-both-sides/537012/>).

⁵³Katherine Pickering Antonova, “How the British Defeated Homegrown Fascism,” *Washington Post*, August 16, 2017 (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/made-by-history/wp/2017/08/16/how-the-british-defeated-homegrown-fascism-and-how-americans-can-do-the-same/?utm_term=.582807c19542).

⁵⁴Tim Hains, “MSNBC’s Donny Deutsch: ‘If You Vote for Trump, You Are Ripping Children from Parents’ Arms,’” *Real Clear Politics*, June 22, 2018 (https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2018/06/22/msnbcs_donny_deutsch_if_you_vote_for_trump_you_are_ripping_children_from_parents_arms.html).

⁵⁵Jonathan Chait, “Liberals Are the Real Nazis,’ Says Donald Trump Jr.: Actual Nazis Disagree,” *Intelligencer*, August 3, 2018 (<http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2018/08/trump-jr-dinesh-dsouza-liberals-are-nazis-actual-nazis-love-trump.html>).

⁵⁶Paul Krugman, “The S Word, the F Word, and the Ballot,” *New York Times*, June 28, 2019, A31.

New York Times writer Roger Cohen warned that “it would be irresponsible ... to forget European history, from whose fascist example [Trump] borrows” and argued that “in Weimar America ... the establishment looks tired [and] ... has not understood the fact-lite theater of the contemporary world.”⁵⁷ A few months later, journalist Andrew Sullivan claimed that there was a “Weimar aspect [to] ... our current moment,” arguing that Trump’s “fascistic movement” posed a serious threat to America’s “late-stage democracy.”⁵⁸ Many critics singled out American conservatives for sharing a common cause with Trump. After the Republican Party embraced him at the party’s nominating convention, Jonathan Chait accused American conservatives of behaving like their German counterparts, who mistakenly thought they could “tame Hitler.”⁵⁹ Historians Nathan Stoltzfus and Eric Weitz made similar points in reminding people that German conservatives served as Hitler’s “enablers” and helped him rise to power.⁶⁰

These warnings became louder after Trump’s election. In December 2016, Paul Krugman published a bleak op-ed entitled “How Republics End,” declaring “it takes willful blindness not to see the parallels between the rise of fascism and our current political nightmare.”⁶¹ In the spring of 2017, historian Geoff Eley’s article “Is Trump a Fascist?” rejected the idea that Trump was Hitler, but insisted that contemporary fears of globalization and immigration were structurally similar to those of the 1930s.⁶² Historian Christopher Browning saw a similar structural role being played by mischievous conservatives in America’s political crisis, noting that although Trump was “not Hitler,” there were “troubling similarities” between the Republican Party’s crusade against American democracy and the Prussian Junkers’ campaign against the Weimar Republic.⁶³ Indeed, according to Andrew Sullivan, even if Trump was not aspiring to be a dictator, he was dismantling American democracy and pursuing an authoritarian state in order to serve his own narcissism.⁶⁴

America Is on the Cusp of Fascism

In order to drive this point home, commentators invented new ways of saying that America was on the fascist precipice. Already in November 2015, conservative radio host Steve Deace

⁵⁷Roger Cohen, “Trump’s Weimar America,” *New York Times*, December 14, 2015 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/15/opinion/weimar-america.html>).

⁵⁸Andrew Sullivan, “Democracies End When They Are Too Democratic,” *New York Magazine*, May 1, 2016 (<http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2016/04/america-tyranny-donald-trump.html?gtm=bottom>).

⁵⁹Jonathan Chait, “How Hitler’s Rise to Power Explains Why Republicans Accept Donald Trump,” *Intelligencer*, July 7, 2016 (<http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2016/07/donald-trump-and-hitlers-rise-to-power.html>).

⁶⁰Nathan Stoltzfus, “Trump Versus Hitler: What We Can Learn from Weimar Germany,” *The Daily Beast*, July 31, 2016 (<https://www.thedailybeast.com/trump-versus-hitler-what-we-can-learn-from-weimar-germany>); Eric Weitz, “Weimar Germany and Donald Trump,” *Tablet*, July 18, 2016 (<https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/207665/weimar-germany-and-donald-trump>).

⁶¹Paul Krugman, “How Republics End,” *New York Times*, December 19, 2016 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/19/opinion/how-republics-end.html>).

⁶²Geoff Eley, “Is Trump a Fascist?,” *LearnSpeakAct*, April 12, 2017 (<https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/learn-speak-act/2017/04/12/is-trump-a-fascist/>).

⁶³Christopher Browning, “The Suffocation of Democracy,” *New York Review of Books*, October 25, 2018.

⁶⁴Andrew Sullivan, “Can Donald Trump Be Impeached?,” *New York Times Book Review*, March 12, 2018 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/12/books/review/impeachment-cass-sunstein-can-it-happen-here.html>).

invoked the possibility of “creeping fascism.”⁶⁵ One month later, the *New York Times* editorialized that Trump had “brought his party and its politics to the brink of fascism.”⁶⁶ Journalist Ross Douhat said that Trump was “closer to the proto-fascist zone ... than the average American conservative.”⁶⁷ Ruth Ben-Ghiat wrote that Trump’s campaign brought to mind “how fascism began.”⁶⁸ Still other critics linked Trump to the ideas of “pre-fascism,” “soft fascism,” “semi-fascism,” and “para-fascism.”⁶⁹ In doing so, they claimed that the United States was approaching fascism, while evading the more controversial claim that it had already arrived.

In short, journalists, scholars, and other pundits employed a wide range of arguments to link Donald Trump to the specter of Nazism. Some were highly rhetorical, others more analytical. But taken together, they constituted a multifront offensive against an acute political threat. By arguing that Trump resembled Hitler, critics hoped to raise concern about, and galvanize opposition to, his candidacy and subsequent administration.

The Realists: Rejecting Trump as Hitler

By contrast, a second group of observers vigorously rejected the premise that Trump amounted to a latter-day Hitler. They took what they viewed as a more realistic stance and argued that Trump did not display the requisite traits to merit being considered a fascist. They insisted that the United States was a far more stable country than Weimar Germany and less vulnerable to a fascist takeover. They did not merely justify their argument analytically, but tactically, explaining that ill-advised comparisons to the Nazi era were counterproductive and obfuscated more than they clarified. Instead, they argued that Trump was best explained by other historical analogies.

Trump Is Not Hitler Because He Is Not a Fascist

Many critics insisted that Trump lacked key fascist traits. These commentators drew on the rich historical and social science literature on fascism to arrive at their conclusions. Whether invoking the concept of “generic fascism,” “Ur-Fascism,” a “fascist minimum,” or a “fascist matrix,” they agreed that Trump displayed characteristics that were typical of fascism—for example, a nationalist orientation, tendency to scapegoat minorities, penchant for conspiracy

⁶⁵Heather Digby Parton, “The Unprecedented Nightmare of Donald Trump’s Campaign,” *Salon*, November 26, 2015 (https://www.salon.com/2015/11/25/the_unprecedented_nightmare_of_donald_trumps_campaign_weve_openly_began_using_the_f_word_in_american_politics/).

⁶⁶The Editorial Board, “The Trump Effect and How It Spreads,” *New York Times*, December 10, 2015 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/10/opinion/the-trump-effect-and-how-it-spreads.html>).

⁶⁷Ross Douhat, “Is Donald Trump a Fascist?,” *New York Times*, December 3, 2015 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/03/opinion/campaign-stops/is-donald-trump-a-fascist.html>).

⁶⁸Ruth Ben-Ghiat, “An American Authoritarian,” *The Atlantic*, August 10, 2016 (<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/08/american-authoritarianism-under-donald-trump/495263/>).

⁶⁹Tobias Haberkorn, “Jeder Faschismus ist anders,” *Die Zeit*, July 31, 2018 (<https://www.zeit.de/kultur/2018-07/praefaschismus-deutschland-zwanziger-jahre-kultur-pessimismus-naika-foroutan>); Zack Beauchamp, “It Happened There: How Democracy Died in Hungary,” *Vox*, September 18, 2018 (<https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/9/13/17823488/hungary-democracy-authoritarianism-trump>); Peter Steinfels, “The Semi-Fascist: How Dangerous Is Donald Trump?,” *Commonweal*, June 17, 2016; Todd Gitlin, “The ‘Truth’ According to Trump,” *Moyers*, June 14, 2016 (<https://billmoyers.com/story/truth-according-trump/>).

thinking, autocratic bearing, and demagogical demeanor.⁷⁰ At the same time, however, they noted that he lacked many of the movement's defining features: a clear ideology, fascist demographic base, enmity toward democracy, commitment to organized violence, an aggressive foreign policy, and support for fascist economic and social policies.

Trump Lacks a Clear Ideology

As early as December 2015, historian Isabel Hull said that Trump was “not principled enough to be a fascist.”⁷¹ Several months later, *Forward* editor Jane Eisner wrote that while Hitler was “motivated by a clear, if twisted, ideology,” Trump’s policies were just “spontaneous pronouncements, without any coherence other than to demonize the other.”⁷² Later that year, the *History News Network* interviewed sixteen historians, most of whom, including Stanley Payne, declared that Trump did “not lead a coherent movement with a specific ethos.”⁷³ Similar comments continued through 2018, when journalist Damon Linker insisted that the president had no “uniform galvanizing ideology,” but rather embraced a kind of “postmodern kleptocratic authoritarianism.”⁷⁴ From these commentators’ perspectives, Trump lacked the willpower to pursue anything beyond his own personal aggrandizement. As journalist Andrew O’Hehir wrote in March 2018, “Trump might *want* to abolish the Constitution and appoint himself dictator for life, but fortunately, ... he lacks ... the vision [and] ... organizational skill [to] ... make that possible.”⁷⁵

Trump Lacks a Fascist Social Base of Support

Critics also noted that Trump’s supporters differed from traditional fascist voters. Whereas the latter had typically been young, revolutionary-minded men, *The Economist* pointed out in May 2016, that “Trumpismo ... has more appeal to the elderly ... [by] trying to bring back the 1950s.”⁷⁶ Other observers went so far as to call Trump’s policies, such as tax cuts for the rich, a “war on youth.”⁷⁷ Journalist T. A. Frank in *Vanity Fair* explained the generational makeup of Trump’s electoral supporters by saying that he “enter[ed] ... politics too

⁷⁰On “generic fascism,” see Stanley Payne, *Fascism: Comparison and Definition* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1983); Umberto Eco, “Ur-Fascism,” *The New York Review of Books*, June 22, 1995. Ernst Nolte established the idea of the “fascist minimum” in his book, *Three Faces of Fascism* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1966). Roger Eatwell, “The Nature of ‘Generic Fascism’: The ‘Fascist Minimum’ and the ‘Fascist Matrix,’” in *Comparative Fascist Studies*, ed. C. Iordachi (London: Routledge, 2010), 1–22; see also Robert Paxton, “Five Stages of Fascism,” in *Journal of Modern History* 70, no. 1 (1998): 1–23.

⁷¹Mike Pearl, “We Asked a Fascism Expert If Donald Trump Is a Fascist,” *Vice*, December 5, 2015 (https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/4wb53d/we-asked-a-fascism-expert-if-donald-trump-is-a-fascist-124).

⁷²Jane Eisner, “Is Donald Trump Really a Hitler-Style Fascist?,” *The Forward*, March 7, 2016 (<https://forward.com/opinion/334847/is-donald-trump-really-a-hitler-style-fascist/>).

⁷³John Broich, “We Asked 16 Historians if They Think Trump Is a Fascist,” *History News Network*, October 23, 2016 (<http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/164170>).

⁷⁴Damon Linker, “The Sickness of Our Time: Is It Populism or Fascism?,” *New York Times Book Review*, February 1, 2018 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/01/books/review/to-fight-against-this-age-rob-riemen.html>).

⁷⁵O’Hehir, “How They Made Germany Great Again.”

⁷⁶J. P. P., “Donald Trump Is Not a Fascist,” *The Economist*, May 30, 2016 (<https://www.economist.com/democracy-in-america/2016/05/30/donald-trump-is-not-a-fascist>).

⁷⁷Henry Giroux, “Fascism’s Return and Trump’s War on Youth,” *The Conversation*, December 13, 2017 (<https://theconversation.com/fascisms-return-and-trumps-war-on-youth-88867>).

late to become a proper tyrant,” implying that, because of his age, he faced higher barriers in relating to young people.⁷⁸ Finally, because he did not share fascism’s cult of youth, Trump lacked its fanaticism. As a *Vox* interview of five historians revealed, Trump had little interest in pursuing a fascist program of revolutionary change and showed no signs of seeking to “overthrow ... the state’s entire system of government.”⁷⁹

Trump Does Not Oppose Democracy

Commentators also noted that Trump was not hostile to democracy. Already in December 2015, journalist Max Ehrenfreund argued that Trump did “not oppose constitutional government and representative democracy.”⁸⁰ One month later, journalist Gianni Riotta said Trump was “not a fascist” because “there is no fascism without [the] ... rational, violent plan to overthrow democracy.”⁸¹ Many academics echoed this point in the months that followed, including historian Jeffrey Herf, who pointed out that Trump did not run on a platform of “substituting dictatorship for democracy.”⁸² After Trump assumed the presidency, historian Victoria de Grazia wrote in *The Guardian* that his first hundred days revealed “how different” he was from Hitler and Mussolini, for although the latter dismantled representative democracy by seizing emergency powers, Trump “embraced the establishment” and eventually would “have to face elections.”⁸³ Similar points were made into the fall of 2018—for example, journalist Isaac Chotiner’s claim in *Slate* that although “Hitler was always opposed to democracy ... Trump seeks to be reelected by popular demand.”⁸⁴

Trump Does Not Support Organized Violence

Critics added that Trump did not support organized violence. While acknowledging that he used violent rhetoric in his campaign rallies, Gianni Riotta said that Trump’s movement was far from the “heart of fascism” because it rejected the use of “terrorism to win political power.”⁸⁵ Around the same time, others noted that Trump did not employ a private paramilitary force like the *Sturmabteilung* (SA).⁸⁶ Historian Richard Evans complained that Madeline

⁷⁸T. A. Frank, “Is Donald Trump an Actual Fascist?,” *Vanity Fair*, June 14, 2016 (<https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2016/06/is-donald-trump-an-actual-fascist>).

⁷⁹Dylan Matthews, “I Asked 5 Fascism Experts Whether Donald Trump Is a Fascist. Here’s What They Said,” *Vox*, May 12, 2016 (<https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2015/12/10/9886152/donald-trump-fascism>).

⁸⁰Ehrenfreund, “Why You Should Stop Calling Trump a Fascist.”

⁸¹Gianni Riotta, “I Know Fascists: Donald Trump Is No Fascist,” *The Atlantic*, January 16, 2016 (<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/01/donald-trump-fascist/424449/>).

⁸²Jeffrey Herf, “Is Donald Trump a Fascist?,” *The National Interest*, March 7, 2016 (<https://www.the-american-interest.com/2016/03/07/is-donald-trump-a-fascist/>). See also Sheri Berman, “Donald Trump Is Not a Fascist,” *Vox*, January 3, 2017 (<https://www.vox.com/the-big-idea/2017/1/3/14154300/fascist-populist-trump-democracy>).

⁸³Victoria de Grazia, “Many Call Trump a Fascist. 100 Days In, Is He Just a Reactionary Republican?,” *The Guardian*, April 30, 2017 (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/apr/30/donald-trump-fascist-republican-100-days>).

⁸⁴Isaac Chotiner, “OK, Trump’s Not a Fascist Leader: But Does His Fascist Rhetoric Mean He’s on the Way to Being One?,” *Slate*, September 10, 2018 (<https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2018/09/trumps-fascist-rhetoric-not-fascist-leader-yet.html>).

⁸⁵Riotta, “I Know Fascists.”

⁸⁶Douthat, “Is Donald Trump a Fascist?”; see also Matthews, “I Asked 5 Fascism Experts Whether Donald Trump Is a Fascist”; Berman, “Donald Trump Is Not a Fascist”; and Herf, “Is Donald Trump a Fascist?”

Albright and Timothy Snyder had failed to note that Hitler employed “private armies of thugs” to seize power and overlooked the fact that contemporary right-wing groups sought “overwhelming electoral dominance” by exploiting the “coercive institutions of the state.”⁸⁷ Scholar Mary Beard accentuated this point by noting that Hitler’s willingness to “arrest, torture and imprison ... opponents” had no counterpart in the United States.⁸⁸

Trump Rejects an Aggressive Foreign Policy

Commentators also insisted that Trump rejected an aggressive foreign policy. In the fall of 2016, historian John McNeill asserted that while interwar “fascists routinely ... sought military solutions to political issues” Trump did not “blithely recommend military action” and often criticized “incompetent military adventurism.”⁸⁹ If anything, journalist James Kitfield argued, Trump’s “America First” slogan was “neo-isolationist” rather than interventionist because it sought to shrink the United States’s global military footprint.⁹⁰ As a result, writer Ted Noel concluded, nothing in Trump’s foreign policy vision bore “even a vague resemblance” to fascism.⁹¹ Trump did not “emulate the Hitlerian goals of wars of conquest,” Christopher Browning asserted. Indeed, as historian Enzo Traverso insisted, Trump’s foreign policy was fundamentally different from the German notion of *Lebensraum* and the Italian notion of *spazio vitale* because his vision did “not transcend his business interests.”⁹² As other critics contended, this stance reflected the fact that Trump, unlike Hitler, never served in the military or experienced the radicalizing effects of war.⁹³ There was thus little reason to fear, writer Peter Reynosa concluded, that Trump wanted to “begin World War III.”⁹⁴

Trump Does Not Support Fascist Economic or Social Policies

Critics also stressed that Trump avoided fascist economic and social policies, preferring individualism over collectivism. Writing in *Forbes* in December 2015, writer Tim Worstall said Trump was not “left-wing enough” in his economic policies “to be a fascist” because the

⁸⁷Richard Evans, “Fascism and the Road to Unfreedom Review,” *The Guardian*, July 19, 2018 (<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/jul/19/fascism-a-warning-madeleine-albright-the-road-to-unfreedom-timothy-snyder-book-review>).

⁸⁸Mary Beard, “Repeating History,” *Times Literary Supplement*, November 13, 2018 (<https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/repeating-history-trump-fascist/>).

⁸⁹John McNeill, “How Fascist Is Donald Trump? There’s Actually a Formula for That,” *Washington Post*, October 21, 2016 (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/10/21/how-fascist-is-donald-trump-theres-actually-a-formula-for-that/>).

⁹⁰James Kitfield, “Trump’s ‘America First’ Neo-Isolationism,” *Center for the Study of the Presidency Blog*, April 28, 2016 (<http://www.thepresidency.org/blog/trump%E2%80%99s-%E2%80%9Camerica-first%E2%80%9D-neo-isolationism-cspc-senior-fellow-james-kitfield>).

⁹¹Ted Noel, “A History Lesson for the ‘Trump Is Hitler’ Crowd,” *The American Thinker*, May 26, 2018 (https://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2018/05/a_history_lesson_for_the_trump_is_hitler_crowd.html).

⁹²Enzo Traverso, “Trump’s Savage Capitalism: The Nightmare Is Real,” *World Policy Journal* 34, no. 1 (2017): 13–17, esp. 16; Browning, “The Suffocation of Democracy.”

⁹³Herf, “Is Donald Trump a Fascist?”

⁹⁴Peter Reynosa, “Why Comparing Donald Trump to Adolf Hitler Is an Embarrassing Act of Ignorance and also Political Irresponsibility,” *Huffington Post*, December 6, 2017 (<https://www.huffingtonpost.com/peter-reynosa/why-comparing-donald-trump-to-adolf-hitler-is-an-embarrassing-act-of-ignorance-and-also-political-irresponsibility>).

latter embraced a “corporatist” kind of state-directed planning, whereas the former supported laissez-faire capitalism.⁹⁵ Similarly, Robert Paxton described Trump as a free market-oriented “plutocrat,” while John Torpey contended that he embraced “capitalist neopatriarchalism,” and Enzo Traverso said he advocated a “savage” form of capitalism “without a human face.”⁹⁶ Trump’s desire to “disable the welfare state” by cutting popular social programs and pursuing privatization initiatives also ran counter to the paternalistic desire of fascist governments to reshape society through state actions.⁹⁷ As philosopher Justin Humphrey concluded, Trump’s lack of any kind of “statist program” meant that his ideology was “not comparable ... [to] European fascism.”⁹⁸

Trump Is Not Fascist Because Fascism Is Left-Wing

Finally, some commentators said Trump could not be considered fascist because fascism was a left-wing movement. This idea was embraced by certain pro-Trump conservatives, most notably pundit Dinesh D’Souza in his documentary film *Death of a Nation*. Released in 2018, the film claimed that Hitler’s support for the welfare state revealed him to be a liberal and proved that “real fascists” were on the left.⁹⁹ This argument helped defend Trump from the charge of fascism and explained why his son, Donald Trump Jr., endorsed the film, predicting it would “fire up Republicans for the midterms” by exposing fascism’s “links to ... progressive[s].”¹⁰⁰ Other conservatives provided historical support for the claim, with writer Stephen Sniegoski contending in June 2016 that President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal had a greater “connection to fascism ... than ... anything Donald Trump has said.”¹⁰¹ More recently, conservative pundit Candace Owens tried to reposition fascism’s political orientation when she insisted that Hitler’s militaristic bid for world power was a form of “globalism” and thus liberal in orientation.¹⁰²

⁹⁵Tim Worstall, “Donald Trump Just Isn’t Left-Wing Enough to Be a Fascist,” *Forbes*, December 11, 2015 (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/timworstall/2015/12/11/donald-trump-just-isnt-left-wing-enough-to-be-a-fascist/#a8cb92d5df60>).

⁹⁶Robert Paxton, “American Duce,” *Harper’s*, May 2017, 38–39; John Torpey, “The End of the World as We Know It: American Exceptionalism in an Age of Disruption,” *Sociological Forum*, 32, no. 3 (2017): 717; Traverso, “Trump’s Savage Capitalism.”

⁹⁷Giroux, “Fascism’s Return and Trump’s War on Youth”; Ian Johnson, “The Problem with the F-Word,” *The American Interest*, May 16, 2017 (<https://www.the-american-interest.com/2017/05/16/the-problem-with-the-f-word/>).

⁹⁸Justin Humphrey, “Fascism in America?,” *Public Seminar*, January 17, 2017 (<http://www.publicseminar.org/2017/01/fascism-in-america/>).

⁹⁹Jonathan Tobin, “Opinion: Hitler Was a Democrat,” *Haaretz*, August 1, 2018 (<https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/.premium-hitler-was-a-democrat-d-souza-s-sick-illiterate-piece-of-agitprop-1.6337523>).

¹⁰⁰Isaac Stanley-Becker, “Under Trump, a Red Carpet for Dinesh D’Souza, Who Claims Hitler Was a Liberal in New Documentary,” *Washington Post*, August 2, 2018 (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2018/08/02/under-trump-a-red-carpet-for-dinesh-dsouza-who-claims-hitler-was-a-liberal-in-new-documentary/?utm_term=.f17f1fc4c7d2).

¹⁰¹Stephen Sniegoski, “Trump and the Fascist Charge,” *The Unz Review*, June 11, 2016 (<https://www.unz.com/article/trump-and-the-fascist-charge/>).

¹⁰²Eugene Scott, “One of Trump’s Most Vocal Black Supporters Seemed to Defend Hitler in a Recent Speech,” *Washington Post*, February 8, 2019 (https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/02/08/one-trumps-most-vocal-black-supporters-seemed-defend-hitler-recent-speech/?utm_term=.0af976048598).

America Is Not Weimar

Skeptics not only asserted that Trump was insufficiently fascist to threaten American democracy, but insisted that the US political system was far stronger than that of the Weimar Republic. In December 2015, Robert Paxton said that although Germany was “humiliated and weakened” after World War I, the United States in 2015 was the “most powerful ... country in the world.”¹⁰³ Historians Daniel Bessner and Udi Greenberg agreed, noting that, in contrast to Germany after 1918, the present-day United States was not traumatized by the experiences of wartime carnage, left-wing revolution, and economic collapse, all of which helped nurture the Nazi movement.¹⁰⁴ Sociologist Charlie Post added that the absence of an assertive labor movement capable of challenging the “rule of capital” in the last two generations meant that “today capitalists have little desire to hand power over to ... fascist gangs.”¹⁰⁵ Finally, Richard Evans cited the Weimar Republic’s climate of extreme violence to remind people that the “warning signs are different now than the signs back then.”¹⁰⁶ For all these reasons, journalist Jonathan Tobin concluded, it was time to reject the “lunacy that ... Americans are living in the ... last days of the Weimar Republic.”¹⁰⁷

This was especially true given the differences between Weimar Germany’s political system and that of the contemporary United States. Prior to Trump’s election, critics emphasized that America was a two-hundred-year-old constitutional democracy, whereas Germany lacked a comparably “strong democratic tradition.”¹⁰⁸ Two years into Trump’s administration, Max Boot asserted that the president was “not going to become a dictator,” thanks to the US political system’s “checks and balances,” “free press,” and “functioning courts.”¹⁰⁹ Jonathan Tobin agreed, saying that more than eighteen months into Trump’s administration, the “evidence of tyranny is scant.”¹¹⁰ Economist Tyler Cowen expressed similar confidence, noting that American democracy was “exceptional” and concluding that the federal government was simply too large to succumb to a fascist takeover.¹¹¹

¹⁰³Siobhan O’Grady, “Trump May Be a Loudmouthed Demagogue, but Is He a Fascist?,” *Foreign Policy*, December 9, 2015 (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/12/09/trump-may-be-a-loudmouthed-demagogue-but-is-he-a-fascist/>).

¹⁰⁴Daniel Bessner and Udi Greenberg, “The Weimar Analogy,” *Jacobin*, December 17, 2016 (<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/12/trump-hitler-germany-fascism-weimar-democracy/>).

¹⁰⁵See Charlie Post’s untitled comments in the *Verso* symposium, “Is Fascism Making a Comeback?,” *Verso Blog*, December 5, 2017 (<https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3514-is-fascism-making-a-comeback>).

¹⁰⁶Isaac Chotiner, “Democracy Dies in a Variety of Ways,” *Slate*, July 12, 2018 (<https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2018/07/why-comparing-trumps-america-to-nazi-germany-misses-the-point.html>); see also Paxton, “American Duce.”

¹⁰⁷Jonathan Tobin, “How Many Times Can Liberal Jews Cry ‘Nazi!’ at Trump?,” *Haaretz*, July 10, 2018 (<https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/.premium-how-many-times-can-u-s-jewish-liberals-cry-nazi-at-trump-1.6264314>).

¹⁰⁸James S. Robbins, “No, This is not Weimar America,” *USA Today*, July 26, 2016.

¹⁰⁹Chauncey Devega, “Max Boot on the End of Conservatism: ‘The Republican Party Needs to Be Burned Down,’” *Salon*, October 16, 2018 (<https://www.salon.com/2018/10/16/max-boot-on-the-end-of-conservatism-the-republican-party-needs-to-be-burned-down>).

¹¹⁰Tobin, “How Many Times Can Liberal Jews Cry ‘Nazi!’ at Trump?”

¹¹¹Quoted in Cass Sunstein, ed., *Can It Happen Here? Authoritarianism in America* (New York: Dey Street Books, 2018), 53, 57.

Comparing Trump with Hitler Is Tactically Misguided

Commentators further rejected Trump/Hitler comparisons on tactical grounds, arguing that they were intellectually lazy, trivialized historical memory, exaggerated popular anxiety, and could backfire by producing a violent overreaction that would alienate moderate voters and benefit Trump.

Comparing Trump with Hitler Violates Godwin's Law

Commentators frequently claimed that Hitler/Trump comparisons violated "Godwin's law of Nazi analogies." Conceived by the blogger Mike Godwin in 1990, this famous internet law affirmed that the longer an online debate persisted, the greater the likelihood would be that someone would mention Hitler. Combined with the related notion—known as Dodd's corollary—that whoever first invoked Hitler automatically lost the debate, Godwin's law provided critics with an easy method of dismissing Trump/Hitler comparisons as rhetorically excessive.¹¹² Commentators from both wings of the political spectrum availed themselves of this argument. In December 2015, Democratic Minnesota state representative Frank Hornstein invoked Godwin's law to claim that "If everyone is Hitler, who is Hitler really? When you go right to a Hitler analogy, you've already lost the argument." Similar attacks were leveled by the white nationalist website VDARE, which alleged that Felipe Calderon's comparison of Trump to Hitler and Roger Cohen's *Times* op-ed "Trump's Weimar America," "went the full Godwin's Law."¹¹³

Comparing Trump with Hitler Trivializes the Memory of Nazism

In violating Godwin's law, critics argued that comparisons between Trump and Hitler trivialized the Nazi era's significance. Jewish commentators were especially outspoken: Rabbi Shmuley Boteach branded the comparisons "utterly abhorrent"; Noah Baron said they were "offensive to those of us who lost ancestors in the Holocaust"; and law professor Alan Dershowitz said they amounted to "Holocaust denial."¹¹⁴ The reason for these strong reactions, according to the American Jewish Committee's Dov Wilker, was that comparing Trump to Hitler "minimizes what the Nazi regime did" and trivialized the

¹¹²See Gavriel Rosenfeld, *Hi Hitler! How the Nazi Past Is Being Normalized in Contemporary Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 335–36.

¹¹³Lori Sturdevant, "Forget Nazi Comparisons—Find Other Ways to Reject Hateful Speech," *The Star Tribune*, December 31, 2015 (<http://www.startribune.com/forget-nazi-comparisons-find-other-ways-to-reject-hateful-speech/363963111/>); Allan Wall, "Great Wall of Trump," *VDARE*, March 12, 2016 (<https://vdare.com/articles/memo-from-middle-america-mexicans-swear-they-ll-never-pay-for-a-border-wall-but-they-will/>); John Derbyshire, "John Derbyshire Says: If You Think Trump Is Adolf Hitler, You're Nuts," *VDARE*, December 15, 2015 (<https://vdare.com/articles/john-derbyshire-says-if-you-think-donald-trump-is-adolf-hitler-you-re-nuts>).

¹¹⁴Shmuley Boteach, "No Holds Barred: The Vile Comparisons of Donald Trump to Hitler," *The Jerusalem Post*, March 7, 2016 (<https://www.jpost.com/Opinion/No-Holds-Barred-The-vile-comparisons-of-Donald-Trump-to-Hitler-447159>); Noah Baron, "No, Donald Trump Isn't Hitler," *Huffington Post*, December 9, 2015 (https://www.huffingtonpost.com/noah-baron/donald-trump-isnt-hitler_b_8751676.html); Alan Dershowitz, "Comparing Trump to Hitler Akin to 'Holocaust Denial' Says Dershowitz on Fox," *Haaretz*, January 2, 2019 (<https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/trump-to-hitler-comparisons-akin-to-holocaust-denial-says-dershowitz-on-fox-1.6805123>).

Holocaust.¹¹⁵ It was important to remember, writer Shalom Auslander insisted, that Trump was just a “con man,” while Hitler was a “psychopath” who murdered millions.¹¹⁶ This difference explained why political scientist Abraham Miller found it “despicable” that Trump’s border separation policy was compared to the Holocaust.¹¹⁷ As lawyer and writer Noah Baron noted, Trump favored the assimilation of immigrants, not their extermination.¹¹⁸ Journalist Brendan O’Neill added that in “calling Trump Hitler,” protesters were “letting Hitler off the hook by misremembering him simply as ... a Trump-style blowhard,” thereby undercutting the effort to combat “ascendant neo-Nazism” by making “Nazism seem not that bad.”¹¹⁹

Comparing Trump with Hitler Is Like “Crying Wolf”

Other critics claimed that overusing Trump/Hitler comparisons would diminish their effectiveness by “crying wolf.” In the fall of 2016, *New York Times* columnist Frank Bruni argued that Democrats had used so much hyperbolic language in criticizing previous Republicans, such as Mitt Romney, that they had no more linguistic weapons to persuasively warn about Trump—the result being that now “no one hears them or heeds them.”¹²⁰ One year later, conservatives gleefully noted how liberal fears of fascism had not come to pass, with the *Wall Street Journal* declaring that “The Great Nazi Scare of 2017” had “proved non-existent.”¹²¹ Historian Deborah Lipstadt added that “using historically invalid analogies gives those responsible for these outrages a chance to wriggle out from the avalanche of justified attacks on their policies ... and shift the conversation to the appropriateness of the comparison” rather than the policies themselves.¹²² Finally, journalist John Podhoretz concluded in June 2018 that “Hitler analogies” end up “discrediting the seriousness of your complaints by overstating things so ... wrongly.”¹²³

Comparing Trump with Hitler Will Alienate Trump Voters

Commentators also argued that Trump/Hitler comparisons would alienate Trump voters. As early as December, 2015, Ross Douhat warned that “tarring [Trump’s] ... supporters with the brush of Mussolini and Der Führer” would “repress the problem rather than dealing with

¹¹⁵Alexandra Sims, “Donald Trump Compared to Adolf Hitler After ‘Complete Shutdown of Muslims’ Comments.” See also Uri Freedman, “Seeing Hitler Everywhere,” *The Atlantic*, October 25, 2016 (<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/10/hitler-trump-putin-duterte/504545/>).

¹¹⁶Shalom Auslander, “Don’t Compare Donald Trump to Adolf Hitler,” *Washington Post*, September 13, 2016 (https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/09/13/dont-compare-donald-trump-to-adolf-hitler-it-belittles-hitler/?utm_term=.db95b9f29119).

¹¹⁷Abraham Miller, “How Despicable and Cheap Can ‘Resistance’ to Trump Get?” *The American Spectator*, July 5, 2018 (<https://spectator.org/trafficking-in-false-comparisons-to-the-holocaust/>).

¹¹⁸Baron, “No, Donald Trump Isn’t Hitler.”

¹¹⁹Brendan O’Neill, “Comparing Trump to Hitler Will Trigger Lethal Results,” *New York Post*, January 26, 2018 (<https://nypost.com/2018/01/26/comparing-trump-to-hitler-will-trigger-lethal-results/>).

¹²⁰Frank Bruni, “Crying Wolf, Then Confronting Trump,” *New York Times*, September 1, 2016 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/01/opinion/campaign-stops/crying-wolf-then-confronting-trump.html>).

¹²¹Hollman W. Jenkins, “The Great Nazi Scare of 2017,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 23, 2017, A13.

¹²²Deborah Lipstadt, “It’s Not the Holocaust,” *The Atlantic*, June 22, 2018 (<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/06/holocaust-family-separation/563480/>).

¹²³Cited in Amy Spiro, “Immigration and the Invocation of the Holocaust,” *Jerusalem Post*, June 19, 2018 (<https://m.jpost.com/Israel-News/Immigration-and-the-invocation-of-the-Holocaust-560364/amp>).

it” by “dismissing discontents [that could] return, stronger and deadlier, ... down the road.¹²⁴ As the campaign continued into the summer of 2016, journalist Jonah Goldberg warned Democrats that “smearing ... Republicans” would “help ... Trump.¹²⁵ After the election, other pundits felt sufficiently vindicated to claim, as political scientist Peter Berkowitz did, that the elites’ overreaction to Trump as a fascist “backfired in 2016” and sank Clinton because the “intemperate condemnation of the people’s judgment bolstered the people’s dim view of the elites.”¹²⁶ Instead of “lumping half of Americans into the same camp as Hitler,” journalist Dirk Kurbjuweit concluded, Democrats should seek to guide “supporters ... of right-wing populism ... away from their leaders and parties.”¹²⁷

Comparing Trump with Hitler Might Lead to Violence

Finally, critics feared that accusing Trump of resembling Hitler could spark a violent, left-wing counter-reaction that would ultimately benefit right-wing forces. Journalist James Kirchick reasoned that “If Trump is a proto-Hitler, then the response to his rule must be commensurate with the challenge” and “liberal Democrats [may well] link arms with the goons of antifa” and pursue a strategy of left-wing violence.¹²⁸ Even more explicit was *National Review* editor Rich Lowry, who said the reason that “Nazi analogies are over the line” was because “You don’t deal with Nazis or tolerate Nazis. You do to Nazis what happened to them in the gruesome Quentin Tarantino film, *Inglourious Basterds*.”¹²⁹ Were this to happen, many commentators feared, the chief beneficiary would be the political right. Looking to history, they noted that violent KPD attacks against the NSDAP in the Weimar Republic had prompted German voters to flock to the Nazis as guarantors of “law and order,” just as left-wing attacks in the United States by the Weather Underground during the 1960s and 1970s drove American voters to embrace Richard Nixon.¹³⁰

Trump Is Best Explained with Other Historical Analogies

Although critics rejected the idea that Trump resembled Hitler, they did not reject all historical analogies. Indeed, they argued that other figures from the past better explained the present.

¹²⁴Douthat, “Is Donald Trump a Fascist?” See also Riotta, “I Know Fascists.”

¹²⁵Jonah Goldberg, “How the Media’s History of Smearing Republicans Now Helps Trump,” *The National Review*, July 27, 2016 (<https://www.nationalreview.com/2016/07/media-helps-trumps-image-because-they-cry-wolf-all-republicans/>).

¹²⁶Peter Berkowitz, “What Elites Still Don’t Understand about Populism,” *Real Clear Politics*, November 27, 2017 (https://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2017/11/27/what_elites_still_dont_understand_about_populism_135619.html).

¹²⁷Dirk Kurbjuweit, “How Much Mussolini Is There in Donald Trump?” *Der Spiegel*, November 26, 2016 (<http://www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/can-donald-trump-be-called-a-fascist-a-1122035.html>).

¹²⁸James Kirchick, “Everybody Hates Nazis,” *Tablet*, November 7, 2017 (<https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/248926/everybody-hates-nazis>).

¹²⁹Rich Lowry, “Rich Lowry: The Tawdry and Dumb Nazi Charge,” *The National Review*, June 30, 2018 (<https://www.slntrib.com/opinion/commentary/2018/06/30/rich-lowry-tawdry-dumb/>).

¹³⁰Laurie Marhofer, “How Should We Protest Neo-Nazis? Lessons from German History,” *The Conversation*, August 21, 2017 (<https://theconversation.com/how-should-we-protest-neo-nazis-lessons-from-german-history-82645>); Ronald Radosh, “Antifa Says It’s Fighting Fascists. It Just Might Be Helping to Re-Elect Donald Trump,” *Daily Beast*, September 11, 2017 (<https://www.thedailybeast.com/antifa-says-its-fighting-fascists-it-just-might-be-helping-to-re-elect-donald-trump>); David Greenberg, “Here’s What Happened the Last Time the Left Got Nasty,” *Politico*, July 5, 2018 (<https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/07/05/democrats-civility-1960s-violence-218948>).

Ancient Tyrants

Some commentators looked to the classical Greco-Roman world and described Trump as an ancient tyrant. In May 2016, Andrew Sullivan invoked Plato's account of Greece's descent from democracy into tyranny after the Peloponnesian war, arguing that it was "hard not to see ... in Trump a demagogic, tyrannical character plucked directly from one of the first books about politics ever written, [*The Republic*]." ¹³¹ Journalist Michael Tomasky cited Polybius's theory of political evolution, known as anacyclosis, and argued that Trump represented the cyclical and inevitable degeneration of democracy into mob rule, or "ochlocracy." ¹³² Other commentators saw Trump as a Roman emperor. Following the lead of journalist Jonathan Jones, who explained that Rome's "diversity of tyrants" proved "you don't have to be a Hitler to threaten democracy," critics compared Trump to the emperors Commodus, Nero, and Caligula, all of whom were erratic, combative, and addicted to spectacle. ¹³³ Taking a different approach, political scientist Yascha Mounk viewed Trump as a populist Roman tribune, calling him "a farcical reincarnation of Tiberius Gracchus" for "acting in the name of the dispossessed" and "shredding the Republic's traditions." ¹³⁴ Finally, Paul Krugman invoked the Roman Republic's collapse, declaring that "Republican institutions don't protect against tyranny when powerful people start defying political norms. And tyranny, when it comes, can flourish even while maintaining a republican facade." ¹³⁵

European Monarchs

Other critics compared Trump to European monarchs. Several commentators argued that Trump resembled the English king Henry VIII with journalist Emile Simpson noting that both rulers were "mercurial egomaniacs who exploit[ed] ... revolutionary networked movement to get power" and columnist Bret Stephens writing that the endless dramas involving Trump's family members evoked the palace intrigue in Henry VIII's royal court. ¹³⁶ Journalist Matthew Rosza compared Trump to King George III, saying both men refused to naturalize foreigners, made judges dependent on the king's will for office, and endeavored to take the army out of the people's control. ¹³⁷ Still others compared Trump to the kings of France.

¹³¹Sullivan, "Democracies End When They Are Too Democratic."

¹³²Michael Tomasky, "The 2,100-Year-Old-Word for Trumpism," *The Daily Beast*, March 19, 2016 (<https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-2100-year-old-word-for-trumpism>).

¹³³Jonathan Jones, "To Understand Trump, We Should Look to the Tyrants of Ancient Rome," *The Guardian*, January 25, 2017 (<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2017/jan/25/donald-trump-president-tyrants-ancient-rome>); Jamieson Webster, "Donald Trump: The Modern-Day Nero Ready to Burn Down America?," *The Guardian*, June 10, 2016 (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/10/donald-trump-modern-day-nero-us-politics-election-2016>).

¹³⁴Yascha Mounk, "What the Fall of the Roman Empire Can Teach Us about America," *New York Times Book Review*, December 24, 2018 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/24/books/review/edward-j-yascha-mortal-republic.html?login=email&auth=login-email>).

¹³⁵Krugman, "How Republics End."

¹³⁶Emile Simpson, "Ego-Maniac Revolutions Don't Last," *Foreign Policy*, March 1, 2017 (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/03/01/ego-maniac-revolutions-dont-last/>); Bret Stephens, "Trump—The Reader's Guide," *Wall Street Journal*, March 1, 2017 (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/trump-the-readers-guide-1485216078>).

¹³⁷Matthew Rosza, "America Has Had a Tyrant Like Trump Before," *Salon*, July 4, 2016 (https://www.salon.com/2016/07/04/america_has_had_a_tyrant_like_trump_before_we_fought_a_revolution_to_get_rid_of_him/) and (<https://www.salon.com/2017/06/25/americas-last-king-the-unsettling-parallels-between-king-george-iii-and-donald-trump/>).

Historian Yair Mintzker said that Trump's West Wing resembled Louis XIV's Baroque court because both featured courtiers constantly flattering the king and avoiding exposing his ignorance, lest they fall from grace.¹³⁸ Less than a year later, historian Christine Adams pointed out that Trump's many female advisers—such as Hope Hicks, Kelleyanne Conway, and Omarosa Manigault—resembled King Louis XV's close relationship to women like Madame Pompadour because both groups “offer[ed] ... comfort not competition.”¹³⁹

Religious Fanatics

Still other commentators looked to early modern European history and viewed Trump as a religious fanatic. Journalist Sasha Abramsky invoked the Spanish Inquisition and wrote that Trump had a “Torquemada ... persona” after the candidate declared that he would “do a lot more than waterboarding” when dealing with Islamist terrorists.¹⁴⁰ Scholars Ian Goldin and Chris Kutarna compared Trump to the fiery renaissance preacher Girolamo Savonarola, noting that both men preached “an apocalyptic message to stoke people's fears” and predicting that the former would eventually meet the same downfall as the latter by failing to keep his promises to his supporters.¹⁴¹ Finally, historian Alec Ryrie and journalist Michael Massing compared Trump to Martin Luther, claiming that both men used new media to incite their “disruptive ... followers” against “the existing establishment” while doing little to “address the underlying sources of resentment.”¹⁴²

Non-Western Autocrats

Trump was also likened to non-Western autocrats. Political scientist Federico Finchelstein, historian Pablo Piccato, and journalist Jack Schwarz looked to Latin America and compared Trump to Argentina's former dictator Juan Peron, arguing that the two men projected a similar kind of “machismo,” while being “adored by the masses” and “reviled by the elite.”¹⁴³ Journalists Catherine Rampell and Jiayang Fan, meanwhile, compared Trump to the Chinese communist leader Mao Zedong, arguing that both men suffered from

¹³⁸Yair Mintzker, “Donald Trump's Ancient Régime,” *Project Syndicate*, June 1, 2017 (<https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/trump-ancien-regime-court-society-by-yair-mintzker-2017-06?barrier=accesspaylog>).

¹³⁹Christine Adams, “Why Trump Resembles a Pre-Revolution French Monarch,” *Washington Post*, March 2, 2018 (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/made-by-history/wp/2018/03/22/why-president-trump-resembles-a-pre-revolution-french-monarch/>).

¹⁴⁰Sasha Abramsky, “Exactly What Kind of Torture Does Donald Trump Want to Use?,” *The Nation*, March 25, 2016 (<https://www.thenation.com/article/exactly-what-kind-of-torture-does-donald-trump-want-to-use/>).

¹⁴¹Ian Goldin and Chris Kutarna, “Why Donald Trump Is a Second Savonarola,” *The Irish Times*, November 6, 2017 (<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/why-donald-trump-is-a-second-savonarola-1.3281556>).

¹⁴²Alec Ryrie, “Martin Luther Was the Donald Trump of 1517,” *Foreign Policy*, May 23, 2017 (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/05/23/martin-luther-was-the-donald-trump-of-1517/>); Michael Massing, “How Martin Luther Paved the Way for Donald Trump,” *The Nation*, April 19, 2018.

¹⁴³Federico Finchelstein and Pablo Piccato, “Trump's Macho Populism,” *Open Democracy*, October 3, 2016 (<https://www.opendemocracy.net/federico-finchelstein-pablo-piccato/trump-s-macho-populism>); Jack Schwartz, “Will Donald Trump Be America's Own Juan Perón?,” *The Daily Beast*, January 23, 2017 (<https://www.thedailybeast.com/will-donald-trump-be-americas-own-juan-peron>).

“xenophobic paranoia,” sought to purge “purported enemies” from the media, and wanted to expunge “diversity ... [and] civil liberty” from daily life.¹⁴⁴

American Precedents

Many observers, finally, sought analogies for Trump in American history. Some looked to twentieth-century plutocrats and celebrities who ran for president as outsider candidates. Journalist Alexander Burns claimed that Trump resembled William Randolph Hearst, who sought the presidency as a Democrat in 1904, but was rejected by the party establishment, which branded him a “dangerous rogue” because of his “blend of populist economic policies and muscular nationalism.”¹⁴⁵ Journalist Arthur Chu argued that Trump resembled Henry Ford because both men were “straight-talkers” who expressed the common people’s anger against elites.¹⁴⁶ Journalist Louisa Thomas compared Trump to the celebrity aviator Charles Lindbergh, who, after flirting with the presidency in 1940, embraced the “America First” slogan in 1941 and became a further model for Trump’s isolationism.¹⁴⁷ Other observers invoked post-1945 plutocrats who ran for president, such as the businessman and cofounder of the John Birch Society, Robert W. Welch Jr., and oil billionaire H. Ross Perot.¹⁴⁸

Trump was also viewed as a right-wing populist. Political scientist Cas Mudde, journalist Uri Friedman, and historian Douglas Kierdorf argued that Trump’s hostility to minorities and immigrants found a precedent in the Nativist movement of the mid-nineteenth century, which responded to the era’s economic and social disruption by opposing the mass immigration of European Catholics to the United States.¹⁴⁹ Historians Linda Gordon and Michael Kazin focused on the importance of violent groups, such as the KKK, which attacked not only blacks and Jews, but cultural elites, secularists, and intellectuals.¹⁵⁰ Other observers pointed to right-wing populists who emerged after 1945—for example, George Wallace, who journalist Frank Rich said resembled Trump by exploiting the racist grievances of

¹⁴⁴Catherine Rampell, “America’s Own Cultural Revolution,” *Washington Post*, January 1, 2018 (https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/americas-own-cultural-revolution/2018/01/01/1f53438e-ef38-11e7-b390-a36dc3fa2842_story.html?noredirect=on); Jianyang Fan, “The Maosim of Donald Trump,” *New Yorker*, May 13, 2016 (<https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/the-maoism-of-donald-trump>).

¹⁴⁵Alexander Burns, “Donald Trump May Break the Mold, but He Also Fits a Pattern,” *New York Times*, July 21, 2016 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/21/us/politics/donald-trump-presidential-race.html>).

¹⁴⁶Arthur Chu, “No Trump Isn’t the Next Hitler,” *Salon*, December 11, 2015 (https://www.salon.com/2015/12/10/no_trump_isnt_the_next_hitler_but_his_real_historical_comparison_is_still_scary/).

¹⁴⁷Louisa Thomas, “America First, for Charles Lindbergh and Donald Trump,” *New Yorker*, July 24, 2016 (<https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/america-first-for-charles-lindbergh-and-donald-trump>).

¹⁴⁸Cas Mudde, “As American as Trump,” *Boston Review*, June 13, 2016 (<http://bostonreview.net/us/cas-mudde-donald-trump-europe-populism>).

¹⁴⁹*Ibid.*; Douglas Kierdorf, “Getting to Know the Know-Nothings,” *The Boston Globe*, January 10, 2016 (<https://www.bostonglobe.com/ideas/2016/01/10/getting-know-know-nothings/yAojakXXkiauKCAzsf4WAL/story.html>).

¹⁵⁰Linda Gordon, “What Do We Mean by Populism?,” *Perspectives*, September 1, 2017 (<https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/september-2017/what-do-we-mean-by-populism-the-second-klan-as-a-case-study>); Michael Kazin, “Trump and American Populism,” *Foreign Affairs*, October 6, 2016 (<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2016-10-06/trump-and-american-populism>).

voters who were resentful of both poor blacks and elite bankers.¹⁵¹ According to journalist Jeet Heer and historian Paul Rahe, finally, the frequent articulation of these grievances throughout twentieth-century American history suggested that Trumpism was a structural constant in American politics, one that flared up every generation and included such figures as Barry Goldwater, Ronald Reagan, and Pat Buchanan.¹⁵²

Assessing the Debate

Over the span of nearly four years, academics, journalists, and other commentators have provoked endless discussion, but failed to reach a consensus about which historical analogies best explain the political rise of Donald Trump. This being the case, it is more than a little tempting to want to break the deadlock and determine, once and for all, which side is “correct.” Yet, it may be more fruitful to explain the absence of a conclusion than to venture one that claims to be definitive. This is especially true because of three important shortcomings inherent to all historical analogies: their empirical unverifiability, liability to politicization, and emotional subjectivity.

Unverifiability

Analogies resist analytical certainty. At the most basic level, analogies are comparisons that seek to determine the extent to which two objects are similar or different. This may seem like a straightforward task, but the act of comparison is less about discovering objective truth than demonstrating plausibility.¹⁵³ Drawing an analogy entails using an existing precedent, or “source,” to shed light on a new object of interest, or “target.”¹⁵⁴ The resulting comparison can be robust, but it is often based on the selective, reductionistic depiction of complex phenomena.¹⁵⁵ The similarities and differences between sources and targets are not absolute, but relative. In some cases, it is easy to determine whether two things are more similar or different, whereas in others the line separating the two can be hazy. It is relatively simple, for example, to identify the stark differences between fascism and liberalism. But it is more difficult to determine how fascism differs from populism; indeed, scholars continue to disagree about where the line between the two lies and how many traits of the former must be visible in the latter before it merits reclassification.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵¹ Frank Rich, “After Trump,” *New York Magazine*, September 13–26, 2017, 25–31.

¹⁵² Jeet Heer, “Horrible Histories,” *The New Republic*, March 9, 2017 (<https://newrepublic.com/article/140952/horrible-histories-perils-comparing-trump-stalin-hitler-dictators>); Paul Rahe is cited in Seth Lipsky, “Every Generation Faces a Populist Challenge Like Trump,” *New York Post*, October 19, 2016 (<https://nypost.com/2016/10/19/every-generation-faces-a-populist-challenge-like-trump/>).

¹⁵³ George O. Kent, “Clio the Tyrant: Historical Analogies and the Meaning of History,” *The Historian* 32, no. 1 (1969): 104.

¹⁵⁴ This process is called “mapping.” See Keith J. Holyoak, “Analogy and Relational Reasoning,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Thinking and Reasoning*, ed. K. J. Holyoak and R. G. Morrison (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), esp. chapter 13.

¹⁵⁵ Markus Komprobst, “Comparing Apples and Oranges? Leading and Misleading Uses of Historical Analogies,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 30, no. 1 (2007): 29. Scot Macdonald, *Rolling the Iron Dice: Historical Analogies and the Decision to Use Military Force in Regional Contingencies* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), 30.

¹⁵⁶ Although Richard Steigmann-Gall has argued that “fascism is always, in its essence, populist,” Federico Finkelstein has argued that “populism ... is [not] a form of fascism.” Richard Steigmann-Gall, “What the Left Doesn’t Understand about Fascism,” *Huffington Post*, October 6, 2016 (https://www.huffpost.com/entry/what-the-american-left-doesnt-understand-about-fascism_b_57f5e21ee4b050f8f9045022).

The difficulty of answering this question is compounded by the inability of scholars to agree on how to define fascism. Since the 1960s, scholars have debated whether to embrace expansive or restrictive definitions of fascism, where to place it on the traditional “left/right” political spectrum, and how to explain its relationship to other movements, such as socialism, liberalism, and conservatism. Much of the disagreement reflects differences of methodological focus. Conclusions vary depending on whether one employs a rigid, taxonomical approach that identifies fascism in a specific set of traits or in a more amorphous set of “mobilizing passions”; whether one adopts a materialist perspective focusing on the economic and social foundations of fascism or a cultural-intellectual approach focusing on its underlying ideas; whether one views fascism as modern or antimodern, revolutionary or reactionary; whether one focuses on countries where fascism seized state power or places where it remained a mere movement; and whether one restricts the focus to interwar Europe or broadens it to the wider world.¹⁵⁷

In debating whether Trump should or should not be compared with Hitler, scholars have often advanced conclusions that rest on imprecise definitions of fascism. Some have used definitions that are overly broad, detecting “fascist” traits in Trump that are also visible in other movements. For example, some of the key traits identified by political scientist Matthew Filner as “fascist”—the belief in national decline, rebirth, and sacrifice—are also visible in the Italian Risorgimento and Zionism, whereas many of the “animating passions” listed by Richard Steigmann-Gall as key to fascism—a collectivist orientation, sense of victimization, and autocratic ruling style—also apply to communism. Other scholars have used sleight-of-hand methods in defining fascism, placing tendentious adjectives—such as “proto,” “soft,” “semi,” and “near”—in front of the noun to imply that Trump resembles a fascist, even if he lacks some of the movement’s key elements.¹⁵⁸ Trump has not tried to violently overthrow democracy, for example, but this has not kept scholars from placing him in the fascist orbit by claiming that his violent *rhetoric* seems to “echo fascism,” as Robert Paxton put it, or that his movement was marked by what philosopher Chiara Bottici described as the “*implicit* [emphasis added] legitimation of violence.”¹⁵⁹ These

Federico Finkelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 4–5.

¹⁵⁷Ernst Nolte and Stanley Payne were among the early proponents of taxonomical definitions of fascism. At the other end of the spectrum, Gilbert Allardyce rejected the existence of “generic fascism” in “What Fascism Is Not: On the Deflation of a Concept,” *American Historical Review*, 84, no. 2 (1979), 367–88. Robert Paxton has thematized the idea of “mobilizing passions” in *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Random House, 2004), 41–42. Marxist scholars have long taken the materialist approach to fascism, while more conservative scholars have focused on the role of ideas. Michael Mann discusses both in his book, *Fascists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Roger Griffin echoed earlier claims by Eugen Weber and Renzo DeFelice that fascism had a modern, revolutionary character. Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). Michel Dobry has criticized the idea that scholars should only study “complete fascism” (where the movement seized state power) and identified fascism in interwar France. Michel Dobry, “Desperately Seeking ‘Generic Fascism,’” in *Rethinking the Nature of Fascism: Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Antonio Costa Pinto (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). Scholars continue to debate whether fascism can be identified in Latin America and Asia.

¹⁵⁸Roman Pilipey, “No This Isn’t the 1930s—But Yes, This Is Fascism,” *The Conversation*, November 16, 2016 (<https://theconversation.com/no-this-isnt-the-1930s-but-yes-this-is-fascism-68867>).

¹⁵⁹Paxton, “The Future of Fascism”; Chiara Bottici, *Verso* forum, “Is Fascism Making a Comeback?” (<https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3514-is-fascism-making-a-comeback>).

examples show how scholars frequently moved the typological goalposts during the debate in support of their classificatory agendas. They were entirely within their rights to do so, of course, but in stretching the definition of fascism, they compounded the difficulty of forging a consensus about its present-day applicability.

Politicization

The disagreement about how to define fascism reflects another shortcoming of historical analogies—the fact that they are often employed to validate preexisting political positions. When people apply sources to targets, they are often selective in identifying similarities and differences; as a result, they exhibit blind spots that weaken the ability of analogies to diagnose present-day realities.¹⁶⁰ In arguing over the merits of Trump/Hitler comparisons, scholars and journalists have often been driven by political agendas. Liberal Democrats have supported such comparisons in order to discredit Trump, while conservative Republicans have rejected them in order to preserve his legitimacy. Yet, not all liberals and conservatives assumed this stance; some of the latter have endorsed the claim that Trump resembled Hitler, while some of the former have rejected it.

Among the most vocal commentators who advanced Trump/Hitler comparisons were moderate conservatives. These critics included Max Boot, Robert Kagan, and Bret Stephens, all of whom belonged to the “Never Trump” camp. Many members of this group hailed from the neo-conservative wing of the Republican Party and were foreign policy hawks, which explained their discomfort with Trump’s neo-isolationist foreign policy. Because they saw him as betraying traditional conservative principles, they explained Trump as an historical aberration. As Boot put it, “I don’t believe there is a clear parallel to Donald Trump in American history.”¹⁶¹ Calling Trump a fascist shifted attention away from the domestic sources of his success and allowed “Never Trumpers” to preserve conservatism’s legitimacy.

Equally surprising was the fact that certain opponents of Trump/Hitler comparisons hailed from the political left. They denied that Trump was a fascist, first, because it implied that he was a foreign import instead of a domestic creation and, second, because it suggested that he represented a novel phenomenon instead of one rooted in American tradition.¹⁶² According to political scientist Corey Robin, fascism was irrelevant for understanding Trump because American history had long oppressed people within its existing constitutional order; rather than representing something “anomalous,” Trump was squarely within, and merely amplified the nasty tendencies of, American conservatism by taking the “racial dog whistles” that had been done “with a wink” under previous Republican administrations and making them explicit.¹⁶³ Journalist Ezra Klein made a similar point, arguing that the United States had

¹⁶⁰Ernest May, *“Lessons” of the Past: The Use and Misuse of History in American Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), xi–xii, 18.

¹⁶¹Devega, “Max Boot on the End of Conservatism.”

¹⁶²Zachary Jonathan Jacobson, “Fascism in the USA, A Rebuttal,” *The Hill*, January 1, 2017 (<https://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/politics/312369-fascism-in-the-usa-a-rebuttal>); Stephen Wertheim, “Forget Whether Trump Is ‘Normal,’” *Washington Post*, June 6, 2018 (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/posteverything/wp/2018/06/06/forget-whether-trump-is-normal-that-wont-help-beat-him/?utm_term=.fd08d6956faa).

¹⁶³“Tracking the Conservative Movement with Corey Robin,” *NBC News*, May 15, 2018 (<https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/corey-robin-conservative-movement-podcast-transcript-ncna874126>).

“seen far more violent, disordered, undemocratic, and illiberal eras than what we have today” and concluded that those who were sounding the alarm bells were “occluding all the undemocratic aspects of U.S. history into a larger story of progress.”¹⁶⁴

Some left-leaning commentators cited political reasons for their stance, insisting that viewing Trump as a product of European fascism would have a quiescent effect, whereas depicting him as a conservative would open up opportunities for progressive action. John Heer argued that, since comparing “Trump to Hitler rather than to George Wallace . . . nurture[s] a reassuring myth Trump is un-American,” the claim that “Trump doesn’t have deep roots in the American experience” implied the misleading belief that “if we simply get rid of Trump, all will be well.”¹⁶⁵ Similarly, historians Samuel Moyn and David Priestland contended that comparing Trump to Hitler reflected a broader “tyrannophobia” that overemphasized the role of individuals in history and obscured the deeper sources of Trumpism, such as economic inequality.¹⁶⁶ Questions of electoral strategy also explained the rejection of Trump/Hitler comparisons. During the campaign between Trump and Clinton in 2016, sociologist Dylan Riley in *Jacobin* wrote that “we should reject absolutely the hysterical lesser-evilism implicit in calling Trump a ‘fascist,’ . . . [because it] plays into the logic of supporting whom-ever [sic] emerges from the Democratic Party primary.”¹⁶⁷ For similar reasons, other leftists opposed calling Trump a populist. Political scientist Jason Frank noted that liberal efforts to paint populism as “right-wing” obscured the role of “neo-liberalism” for worsening the income inequality that produced Trump, and James Miller decoupled Trump and populism in order to stress how the latter could “actually be good for democracy.”¹⁶⁸

In debating whether Trump should or should not be compared with Hitler, both sides’ political agendas shaped their choice of analogies. Leftists embraced structural explanations for Trump and emphasized continuities with American history. In so doing, however, they displayed blind spots. By conceiving fascism as foreign, they ignored the existence of a small, but extant, American fascist tradition dating back to the 1930s and overlooked the possibility that Trump might be tapping into it.¹⁶⁹ This blind spot ultimately proved costly, for in believing that Trump represented nothing new, leftists saw little reason to back his liberal opponent, Hillary Clinton, and instead voted for third-party candidates.

¹⁶⁴Ezra Klein, “American Democracy Has Faced Worse Threats than Donald Trump,” *Vox*, May 10, 2018 (<https://www.vox.com/2018/5/10/17147338/donald-trump-illiberal-undemocratic-elections-politics>).

¹⁶⁵Heer, “Horrible Histories.”

¹⁶⁶Samuel Moyn and David Priestland, “Trump Isn’t a Threat to Our Democracy. Hysteria Is,” *New York Times*, August 11, 2017.

¹⁶⁷See Dylan Riley’s contribution to “Is Donald Trump a Fascist?” *Jacobin*, December 15, 2015 (<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/12/donald-trump-fascism-islamophobia-nativism/>); see also Charlie Post, “The Trump Problem,” *Jacobin*, April 4, 2016 (<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/04/donald-trump-republican-party-primary-president/>).

¹⁶⁸Jason Frank, “Populism Isn’t the Problem,” *Boston Review*, August 15, 2018 (<http://bostonreview.net/politics/jason-frank-populism-not-the-problem>); James Miller, “Could Populism Actually Be Good for Democracy?” *The Guardian*, October 11, 2018 (<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/oct/11/could-populism-actually-be-good-for-democracy>).

¹⁶⁹See Richard Steigmann-Gall, “What the American Left Doesn’t Understand about Fascism,” *Huffington Post*, October 6, 2016 (https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/what-the-american-left-doesnt-understand-about-fascism_us_57f5e21ee4b0508f9045022); Joe Allen, “When Fascism Was American,” *Jacobin*, December 29, 2015 (<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/12/trump-coughlin-nazis-christian-front-kristallnacht-antisemitism-kasich-fascism/>).

Few leftists acknowledged the failure of this strategy after Trump's victory, however, in the hope of preserving their political beliefs intact. By contrast, moderate conservatives were driven by similar motives but drew different conclusions. They, too, remained true to their historiographical tendencies and emphasized the role of individual agency instead of structural continuities in American history. By depicting Trump as a fascist, they hoped to portray him as an aberration within the country's long conservative tradition, thereby preserving its integrity. Yet, although their view was equally selective, it proved temporary because many of its supporters ultimately left the Republican Party.¹⁷⁰

Subjectivity

Historical analogies, finally, are imperfect tools for making sense of present-day events because of their subjectivity. Analogies serve an important psychological function insofar as they provide people with a sense of solace and orientation when they are confused by new circumstances.¹⁷¹ Yet, in doing so, they can prompt people to misinterpret the past. Analogies can mislead in two ways: by fostering a sense of complacency and by generating feelings of alarmism toward contemporary events. On the one hand, analogies can reassure people that a new event is merely a repetition of a past event and thereby lead them to underestimate its novelty. On the other hand, analogies can alarm people that a new event is unprecedented and lead them to inflate its danger. Both responses can produce ill-advised strategies of under- and over-reaction.

Throughout the debate over Trump/Hitler comparisons, both sides were aware of, and directly addressed, the trade-offs between complacency and alarmism. Those who favored Trump/Hitler comparisons saw a greater danger in underestimating the threat that he posed. In response to Moyn and Priestland's claim that fears of a Trump dictatorship amounted to "tyrannophobia," for example, political scientist Roger Berkowitz replied, "It's too early to judge, but not too early to be wary."¹⁷² Historian Jane Caplan went further, saying that although people might be making panicked comparisons to the 1930s for "emotional [rather than] than historical reasons," it was "better to be scared than complacent."¹⁷³ Journalist Katha Pollitt agreed, arguing that the only reason Trump had not yet eroded democracy was because the fear that "democracy ... really is under threat" from fascism had sparked "massive resistance" against him.¹⁷⁴ Finally, Mike Godwin said that his own eponymous internet law should not be a barrier to comparison, declaring it was permissible to make Hitler analogies so long as they "show[ed] some real awareness about history."¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁰Prominent Republicans who left the party included Steve Schmidt, Joe Scarborough, George Will, and Mary Matalin. See Callum Borchers, "Steve Schmidt, Never Trumpers, and Life after the GOP," *Washington Post*, June 28, 2018 (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2018/06/20/steve-schmidt-never-trumpers-and-life-after-the-gop/?utm_term=.4b35c8a511a0).

¹⁷¹Arno Mayer, "Uses and Abuses of Historical Analogies: Not Munich But Greece," *Annales d'études internationales* 1 (1970): 226.

¹⁷²Roger Berkowitz, "Tyrannophobia," *Medium*, August 13, 2017 (<https://medium.com/amor-mundi/tyrannophobia-b05eda5f6d6>).

¹⁷³Caplan, "Donald Trump: Between Election and Inauguration," 9.

¹⁷⁴Katha Pollitt, "It's Not Hysterical to Recognize the Threat Trump Poses," *The Nation*, August 17, 2017 (<https://www.thenation.com/article/its-not-hysterical-to-recognize-the-threat-trump-poses/>).

¹⁷⁵Mike Godwin, "Sure, Call Trump a Nazi," *Washington Post*, December 14, 2015 (https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/12/14/sure-call-trump-a-nazi-just-make-sure-you-know-what-youre-talking-about/?utm_term=.3b46e7404511).

By contrast, those who opposed Trump/Hitler comparisons saw a greater danger in alarmism. Many rejected such comparisons as overly deterministic. According to sociologist Frank Furedi, critics were guilty of employing a “fashionable teleological reading of history” every time they attacked Trump’s rhetoric with the slogan “the Holocaust did not begin with gas chambers ... but with words.”¹⁷⁶ Other commentators criticized the deterministic thrust of tendentious terminology, such as “near fascism,” “pre-fascism,” and “proto-fascism,” arguing that they could backfire by promoting a dispiriting kind of fatalism. Writing after Trump’s inauguration in January 2017, journalist Richard Kauffmann cautioned activists against promoting the view that the United States would “inevitab[ly] ... move in an authoritarian direction” under Trump because doing so could “weaken our own response to him” and make dictatorship “a self-fulfilling prophecy.”¹⁷⁷

Lessons from the Debate

Given the many pitfalls of historical analogies, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the key question driving the Trump/Hitler debate—whether or not the Nazi past helps us understand the American present—is unanswerable. It should be theoretically possible, of course, to accurately assess the dangers facing American democracy. If, as scholars have shown, all causation results from the complex interplay of “forces” and “systems,” then America’s political future will depend on the relative strength of anti-democratic forces and the country’s political institutions.¹⁷⁸ This being the case, it may not matter how we define the former—as fascist, nativist, or populist—if the danger they pose ultimately depends on the stability of the latter.

And yet, because we need to know what forces we are up against, accurate definitions are important. Here is where German historians can make a contribution. As we use our academic expertise to draw analogies between yesterday and today, we must remember to stress not only similarities but also differences. For us to do so effectively, Germanists should rely not only on our own knowledge base, but adopt an interdisciplinary perspective that draws on the knowledge of other relevant fields. We should especially delve into the theoretical literature on populism and fascism and deepen our familiarity with their role in twentieth-century American history. Many German historians have already done so, but the more we do, the better equipped we will be to preserve the legitimacy of drawing future historical analogies. The importance of this task was underscored in the summer of 2019 when German historians Andrea Orzoff and Anika Walke gathered more than five hundred scholars of German and Holocaust history to protest a statement issued by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum opposing the drawing of analogies between the Holocaust and present-day events in the United States.¹⁷⁹ This effort showed the potential for scholars to work collectively to

¹⁷⁶Frank Furedi, “Just Like Hitler,” *Spiked*, February 20, 2017 (<https://www.spiked-online.com/2017/02/20/just-like-hitler-the-diminishing-of-the-holocaust/>).

¹⁷⁷Richard Kauffmann, “The Call to Moral Resistance,” *The Christian Century*, January 20, 2017 (<https://www.christiancentury.org/blog-post/call-moral-resistance>).

¹⁷⁸Yemima Ben-Menahem, “Historical Necessity and Contingency,” in *A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography*, ed. Aviezer Tucker (Chichester, England: Wiley, 2009), 110–30.

¹⁷⁹“An Open Letter to the Director of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum,” *New York Review of Books*, July 1, 2019 (<https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2019/07/01/an-open-letter-to-the-director-of-the-holocaust-memorial-museum/>).

defend the principle of freedom of inquiry and, in the process, preserve their reputations as trustworthy commentators on matters pertaining to the historical record.

While this scholarly effort continues, it is not too early to present several hypotheses about the relationship between the Nazi past and the American present. The first is that Trump shares affinities with *both* fascism and populism. This is hardly a controversial claim given the similarities between the two movements. And yet, given the main difference separating them—the fact that fascists are more willing than populists to use violence to achieve their goals—it is likely that the absence of this dimension from Trump’s policies, at least thus far, places him more in the latter camp.¹⁸⁰ The second hypothesis is that Trump may be best analyzed within an American, rather than a European, context. This assertion should also not be surprising given Trump’s affinities with previous American populists. Yet, it should not lead us to dismiss the possibility that Trump’s rise also reflects the existence of fascist tendencies within the United States. Although interwar American fascism has often been dismissed as part of a “Brown Scare” that never amounted to much, scholars would do well to recognize its existence and contribution to present-day right-wing activity in the United States.¹⁸¹ In short, the more German historians delve into American history, the better we will be able to objectively analyze present-day trends.

At the same time, we need to recognize how subjective fears can complicate this analytical agenda. Thanks to the experience of the Nazi era, the forces of memory are sure to shape our understanding of history. During the years 1930–1945, Western observers employed countless historical analogies to make sense of Adolf Hitler. By the end of World War II, however, they realized that their comparisons had all underestimated his radicalism. In response, observers after 1945 resolved never to make the same mistake again. Preferring to err on the side of caution, they routinely invoked the Nazi dictator when confronting new postwar threats. The full history of Hitler analogies remains to be written, but the reason why his specter has hovered over, and complicated the effort to understand, Donald Trump is clear: the burdens of historical memory have made it impossible to view the immediate present apart from the recent past.

With this in mind, it is important for German historians to recognize three phenomena that have shaped the Trump/Hitler debate and will influence the use of historical analogies going forward: 1) the law of analogical exhaustion; 2) the Hitler analogy paradox; and 3) the dialectic of normalization.

The Law of Analogical Exhaustion

The debate reveals, first of all, that the use of specific analogies often sparks opposition to the use of analogies in general. Like the creation of an economic bubble, the oversupply of analogies—and their inability to produce a popular consensus—can lead to their devaluation and eventual dismissal. Early in the Trump/Hitler debate, the fear of scholars, such as historian

¹⁸⁰In “The Populist Specter,” *The Nation*, January 10, 2019, Stephen Hahn noted that although populism shares fascism’s nationalism, anti-elitism, and hostility to outsiders, it differs in its greater commitment to democracy and lesser use of violence.

¹⁸¹See Gary Alan Fine and Terence McDonnell, “Erasing the Brown Scare: Referential Afterlife and the Power of Memory Templates,” *Social Problems* 54, no. 2 (2007): 170–87, which draws on the famous concept by Leo Ribuffo. See also Bradley W. Hart, *Hitler’s American Friends: The Third Reich’s Supporters in the United States* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2018).

Linford Fisher, that many Hitler comparisons were not “rooted in ... meaningful knowledge about the past” led others, such as historian Thomas Weber, to claim they were creating a “smokescreen” blocking “more instructive historical analogies.”¹⁸² Some critics, like historian Moshik Temkin, went further, arguing that because “historical analogies ... are often misleading when it comes to Mr. Trump,” it was clear that “Historians shouldn’t be pundits.”¹⁸³ In the end, some commentators were tempted to throw the baby out with the bathwater and conclude that analogies were of little use whatsoever. As historian Sean Wilentz wrote, because there was “no precedent for Donald Trump” in American history, there was no point in drawing analogies to explain him, for they would only serve to normalize what was “utterly abnormal.”¹⁸⁴ Even if there were a suitable analogy, journalist Lee Siegel argued, the fact that historical analogies didn’t save us from Hitler back in the 1930s meant that “remembering history won’t save us from Donald Trump.”¹⁸⁵ As Frank Bruni concluded in July 2019, the fact that liberal activists “used the word ... fascist [to attack Trump before the 2016 election] ... and he won [anyway]” meant that it was best to abandon alarmist historical arguments for a positive message about “the America that Democrats want to create.”¹⁸⁶

The Hitler Analogy Paradox

These skeptical conclusions reflected the existence of a second phenomenon that informed the debate: the Hitler analogy paradox. Although people throughout the postwar period have sought to combat present-day threats by comparing them to Hitler, the proliferation of such comparisons have paradoxically diluted their power. Thanks to the process of “symbolic inflation,” the value of “Hitler” as an admonitory signifier has become progressively devalued over time; because the flood of Hitler comparisons has inevitably included more implausible examples, it has activated an analogical version of Gresham’s law of language—in which “bad” (read: reckless) meanings drive out “good” (read: responsible) ones—and led people to ignore Hitler analogies altogether.¹⁸⁷ This pattern is further reinforced by the fact that Hitler’s status as the Western world’s icon of evil leads people to follow a version of Say’s Law—the idea that the supply of something creates the demand for it—and flock to Hitler as the primary “source” to make sense of contemporary “targets.” This dynamic produces another unintended consequence: because people have become conditioned to expect panicked references to Hitler if a problem is serious, they will surmise that the absence of such references means the problem is not that bad. People thus invoke Hitler for reasons of insurance, convinced that unless they summon him to

¹⁸² Linford Fisher, “Your Hitler Analogy Is Wrong,” *Vox*, April 19, 2017 (<https://www.vox.com/2016/4/19/11450526/trump-is-hitler>); Weber is cited in Uri Friedman, “Seeing Hitler Everywhere,” *The Atlantic*, October 25, 2016 (<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/10/hitler-trump-putin-duterte/504545/>).

¹⁸³ Moshik Temkin, “Historians Should Not Be Pundits,” *New York Times*, June 26, 2017, A23.

¹⁸⁴ Sean Wilentz, “No, There Is No Precedent,” *Democracy*, Fall 2017 (<https://democracyjournal.org/magazine/46/no-there-is-no-precedent/>).

¹⁸⁵ Lee Siegel, “Remembering History Won’t Save Us from Donald Trump,” May 8, 2017 (<https://www.cjr.org/analysis/trump-nixon-president.php>).

¹⁸⁶ Frank Bruni, “How Democrats Defeat Donald Trump,” *New York Times*, July 21, 2019.

¹⁸⁷ Orrin E. Klapp, *Inflation of Symbols: Loss of Values in American Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1991), 1–5, 18.

discredit what they fear, the threat will not be taken seriously. This further perpetuates the process of symbolic inflation, however, and normalizes what was originally exceptional.¹⁸⁸

The Dialectic of Normalization

In a further paradox, however, the process of normalization may ultimately promote, rather than inhibit, the value of analogizing. Debates over Hitler comparisons resemble larger debates over how to confront, interpret, and remember the legacy of the Third Reich. Since the end of World War II in Europe, the United States, and beyond, the supporters of a moralistic form of remembrance have clashed with the supporters of normalization. This clash intensified after the turn of the millennium, when the “memory boom” of the 1990s sparked an illiberal backlash against what critics called a masochistic, politically correct culture of contrition. Rather than leading to the suppression of memory, however, this backlash has paradoxically promoted it in keeping with the “dialectic of normalization.” According to this phenomenon, every attempt to forcibly render a traumatic historical legacy “normal” ends up underscoring its exceptionality by unleashing bitter debate that keeps it in public view. For this reason, the debate over Hitler analogies may ultimately preserve a wider awareness about their relative merits.¹⁸⁹

The Future

How these phenomena will shape the ongoing discussion about the relevance of Nazi analogies in America is unclear. It would be a mistake, however, to look to the future with any certainty. Plenty of predictions about Trump—whether rooted in undue confidence or excessive panic—never came to pass; just as certain pundits mistakenly predicted that Trump would never be elected president, others mistakenly predicted his election would lead to a Hitler-style coup and represent an “extinction-level event” for democracy.¹⁹⁰ At the same time, however, we also know that people can be prescient. Plenty of commentators have claimed that Trump’s rise was predicted by earlier thinkers, whether writers, such as Robert Musil and Sinclair Lewis, or philosophers, such as Theodor Adorno and Richard Rorty.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸Jeffrey Alexander has identified a similar dynamic in Holocaust comparisons. See Rosenfeld, *Hi Hitler!*, 94–96, 107.

¹⁸⁹Rosenfeld, *Hi Hitler!*, 13–14.

¹⁹⁰Chauncey De Vega, “Historian Timothy Snyder: ‘It’s pretty much inevitable’ that Trump Will Try to Stage a Coup and Overthrow Democracy,” *Salon*, May 1, 2017 (<https://www.salon.com/2017/05/01/historian-timothy-snyder-its-pretty-much-inevitable-that-trump-will-try-to-stage-a-coup-and-overthrow-democracy/>); Sullivan, “Democracies End When They Are Too Democratic.”

¹⁹¹David Auerbach, “Make America Austria Again: How Robert Musil Predicted the Rise of Donald Trump,” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, August 7, 2016 (<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/robert-musil-predicted-rise-donald-trump/>); Jules Stewart, “The 1935 Novel that Predicted the Rise of Donald Trump,” *The Guardian*, October 9, 2016 (<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/shortcuts/2016/oct/09/it-cant-happen-here-1935-novel-sinclair-lewis-predicted-rise-donald-trump>); Alex Ross, “The Frankfurt School Knew Trump Was Coming,” *New Yorker*, December 5, 2016 (<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-frankfurt-school-knew-trump-was-coming>); Jennifer Senior, “Richard Rorty’s 1998 Book Suggested Election 2016 Was Coming,” *New York Times*, November 20, 2016 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/21/books/richard-rortys-1998-book-suggested-election-2016-was-coming.html>).

As a result, it is important to take nothing for granted and closely monitor future developments. At the time of this writing, commentators continue to warn that Trump's autocratic tendencies, nationalistic demagoguery, and xenophobic race-baiting echo the excesses of the Nazi era. Given that this behavior is likely to continue up through the 2020 election, pundits are right to warn that, even if Trump ends up being merely a "transitional" figure, the deeper crisis of democracy will persist long after he leaves the White House.¹⁹² This is especially true given the ongoing threat of right-wing extremism, which continues to manifest itself in real and virtual attacks against churches, synagogues, mosques, bookstores, journalists, and politicians. For all of these reasons, commentators continue to warn about the future emergence of a "Hitler-like figure" even after Trump is gone.¹⁹³ In the end, the greatest insurance will come by reinforcing the strength of the US's democratic system so that it can weather the force of future storms. If historical analogies derived from the Nazi era can raise awareness of this task's significance, any accompanying acrimony about their appropriateness will be worth it.

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¹⁹²Katha Pollitt, "How to Destroy Democracy the Trump-Putin Way," *The Nation*, July 20, 2018 (<https://www.thenation.com/article/destroy-democracy-trump-putin-way/>); Mounk, "What the Fall of the Roman Republic Can Teach Us about America."

¹⁹³Sheri Berman said that the current populism could be a harbinger of future fascism, "Populism Is Not Fascism," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2016 (<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2016-10-17/populism-not-fascism>); "Republican Mark Sanford Warns 'Hitler-Like' Figure May Emerge under Trump 'Cult of Personality,'" *Newsweek*, December 26, 2018 (<https://www.newsweek.com/mark-sanford-adolf-hitler-donald-trump-cult-personality-republican-party-1272096>).