

What is Fascism? What is Neoliberalism? Definitions

By Critical Resistance National Anti-Policing Workgroup and The Abolitionist Editorial Collective

FASCISM

Fascism is an aggressive political ideology and system, and a form of far-right populism. Fascism is a reactionary politic rooted in authoritarian nationalism, hetero-patriarchy, hyper-militarism, dominance, exclusion, elitism, and supremacy.

Fascism is most commonly associated with World War-era dictatorship, but includes a much broader historic reach and impact in global politics. Fascist regimes vary based on different historical and geographic contexts. They have included European dictatorships (such as Franco in Spain, Mussolini in Italy, and Hitler and the Nazi Party in Germany), and those in the Global South, where rising fascist leaders worked on behalf of colonial interests or imperialist control (such as Pinochet in Chile, Duterte in the Philippines, and Modi in India). Fascism consistently glorifies national, racial, and cultural unity and collective rebirth, while seeking to eliminate imagined enemies; it attacks both revolutionary movements and liberal pluralism in favor of militarized, totalitarian, exclusionary, and elitist mass politics. Fascism opposes liberalism, Marxism, socialism, communism, Third World and Indigenous self-determination, anarchism, anti-authoritarian politics, feminism, and queerness. Fascism is most accurately placed on the far-right of the traditional left-right political spectrum.

Editors' Note: The above definition is based off of similar definitions from the Center for Political Education (CPE) and the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition. We are grateful to our comrades at the CPE and the Coalition for their sharp and generous work to more rigorously develop our movement's consciousness and analysis.

NEOLIBERALISM

Marking the era since the 1970s, neoliberalism refers to a stage of "free-market" capitalism, which is a collection of liberal economic policies based on the eighteenth-century ideologies

of Adam Smith. Five pillars of neoliberalism include: "Free-market" rule of the economy; gutting of public expenditure for social services and the social welfare net; privatization of the public sector; deregulation of government oversight concerning corporate interests; and the elimination of the "public good" or community, by upholding ultra-individualistic notions of responsibility and championing the pursuit of individual self-interest at the expense of the collective. Masquerading as "fiscal responsibility", neoliberalism redistributes resources into the hands of corporations and wealthy elites and maintains a positive view of state spending on militarism and social control priorities, like the prison industrial complex (PIC). Referring to what Critical Resistance co-founder Ruthie Gilmore has termed "organized abandonment", neoliberalism uses the PIC's tools—including surveillance, criminalization, and imprisonment—as substitutes for the structural change required to repair the long history of racial, gender, and economic oppression in the US.

Historic origins and context

Neoliberalism evolved during second half of the twentieth century in response to domestic and global challenges to colonialism, racial capitalism, and structural discrimination mounted by a century of gains by anti-colonial, civil rights, and Black power movements in the early 1900s. Following the gradual successes of increased access to public resources for Black people, communities of color, and workers from the racial and economic justice movements in the US and globally, the state, in turn, divested from public schools, hospitals, housing, social benefits, and entitlements. This collection of economic and social policies gained traction in the US under the Reagan Administration and became popularly known as "Reaganomics". Similar changes took place globally over the past five decades through "structural adjustment programs" imposed on nations of the Global South by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, as well as more regionally-specific economic mandates in the 1990s, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). In the wake of structural economic oppression, exclusion, and growing deindustrialization, the

state justified these divestments through demonizing, scapegoating, and projecting moral failure and individual irresponsibility onto communities struggling to survive. Ultimately, neoliberalism helps maintain the status quo of racial capitalism, by entrenching poverty and marginalization of communities of color within the US and imposing economic dependence upon wealthy imperial countries—like the US—in the Global South.

More on neoliberalism and the PIC

Editors' Note: The following is excerpted and summarized from *Epicenter: Chicago: Reclaiming a City from Neoliberalism* by Andrea J. Ritchie in collaboration with Black Lives Matter Chicago. Published by Political Research Associates in 2019.

In the 1970s through the early 2000s across the US, public officials responded to mounting protests and urban rebellions fueled by the crises of capitalism by declaring "war on crime", "war on drugs", "war on gangs", and "war on terror". These militarized and economically-repressive programs utilized propaganda that declared dysfunctional "cultures of poverty" and characterized the "enemy" in highly racialized and gendered terms. Politicians, including the Clintons and President Joe Biden, painting themselves as progressive, adopted a militarized "law and order" agenda that further exacerbated economic conditions of widespread poverty and unemployment in Black and Brown communities, through increased policing, prison expansion, and sentence enhancements. These criminalization policies compounded the ongoing legacies of structural exclusion of Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and immigrant peoples in housing, education, and public health. These tropes undergirded implementation of the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, championed by Biden and the Clintons, which created hundreds of new federal crimes, imposed harsh "three strikes" penalties, and poured resources into law enforcement-based responses to everything from violent crime to domestic violence to drug offenses. ♦

Fascist Emergency Playbook

By Ejeris Dixon

Editors' Note: Throughout 2020, movement strategists have been speaking at virtual events sharpening organizers' collective analysis to better make sense of our current political moment. One brilliant strategist, Ejeris Dixon, Executive Director of the organization Vision Change Win, has been leading conversations on how to resist fascism, helping the left recognize the strategies used in what she calls "the Fascism Emergency Playbook." As an organizing resource and tool, we've compiled some of her analysis from an op-ed she wrote in April 2020 in Truthout called "Fascists are Using COVID-19 to Advance Their Agenda. It's Up to Us to Stop Them," along with notes from a talk she gave during a Center for Political Education class in August 2020 "Road to Rebellion."

Over the past few years, we've watched the rise of a global fascist movement in the US, Russia, India, Brazil, the United Kingdom, and many other countries. And while scholars and writers currently debate whether to call Trump an authoritarian, autocrat or a fascist, it's clear that he's not a fan of democratic institutions and that he works from a fascist playbook. Fascist and authoritarian governments often exploit, accel-

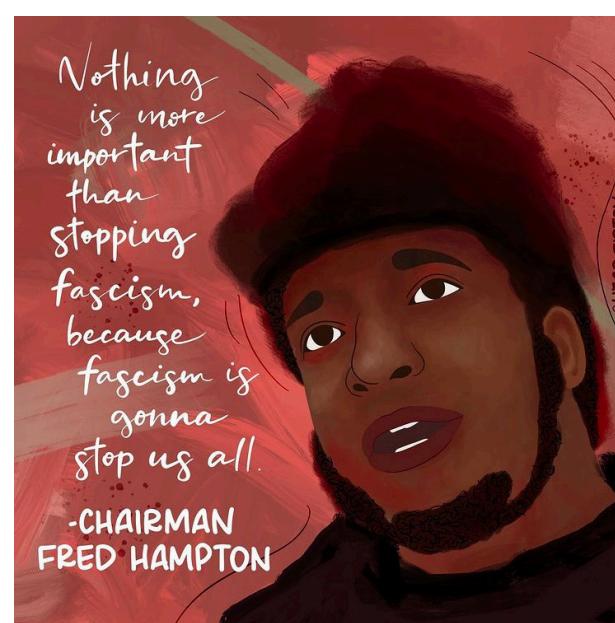


Image of Fred Hampton with Fred Hampton quote by Elizabeth Hee

erate, or create emergencies to increase their power and further their agendas.

Here's the fascist emergency playbook:

- **Use the emergency to restrict civil liberties** — particularly rights regarding move-

ment, protest, freedom of the press, a right to a trial, and freedom to gather;

- **Use the emergency to suspend governmental institutions**, consolidate power, reduce institutional checks and balances, and reduce access to elections and other forms of participatory governance;
- **Promote a sense of fear and individual helplessness**, particularly in relation to the state, to reduce outcry and to create a culture where people consent to the power of the fascist state;
- **Replace democratic institutions** with autocratic institutions using the emergency as justification;
- **Create scapegoats for the emergency**, such as immigrants, people of color, disabled people, or ethnic and religious minorities to distract public attention from the failures of the state and the loss of civil liberties.

A Pathway Towards Liberation

Despite these grim circumstances, fate has handed us a society-changing opportunity wrapped within a tremendous challenge. We must think in terms of Antonio Gramsci's concept of "interregnum", a time period in which, "the old [world] is dying and the new cannot be born." In this liminal space, we have the opportunity to define that new society and call it forth. Time is limited and the opportunity is precious. So where does the left go from here in terms of both addressing increased repression and moving towards a more liberated future?

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