

Usage, Incrementalism, and Fascism

Wednesday, April 22, 2020

Definition of the word <i>fascism</i> as of the date shown	The rest of the story
1941: any system of government in which property is privately owned, but all industry and business is regulated by a strong national government —Thorndike Century Senior Dictionary	This is the kind of system that my father fought to end, during WWII. It's an exact description of the United States of America, today.
1955: a centralized system of government which exercises absolute control over industry, and which advocates strong national policies, regulates all news and suppresses opposition —Webster's New School and Office Dictionary	The addition of key words (absolute control over industry) and selected ideas (regulates all news) prevented people from perceiving this definition as a description of the United States of America, in 1955.
1961: Any program for setting up a centralized autocratic national regime with severely nationalistic policies, exercising regimentation of industry, commerce, and finance, rigid censorship, and forcible suppression of opposition —Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary	By 1961, it was more difficult to avoid fitting the definition. It became necessary to specify that fascism wasn't anything that was actually happening. It was only a program for setting up an autocratic regime. This rendered the idea safely remote.
1965: a political philosophy, movement, or regime that exalts nation and race and stands for a centralized autocratic government headed by a dictatorial leader, severe economic and social regimentation, and forcible suppression of opposition —Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary	This definition is even more remote. Fascism wasn't even a program any more, but only a philosophy or possibly a movement. The word <i>regime</i> would more likely have been thought of as applying to foreign governments.
1973: a political philosophy, movement, or regime (as that of the Fascisti) that exalts nation and race above the individual and that stands for a centralized autocratic government headed by a dictatorial leader, severe economic and social regimentation, and forcible suppression of opposition —Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary	This definition more carefully applied the definition to the Fascisti, a regime safely remote from the USA in both time and place. Also, it was no longer fascist to exalt nation or race. To exalt nation or race above the individual was fascist.
1987: a political philosophy, movement, or regime (as that of the Fascisti) that exalts nation and often race above the individual and that stands for a centralized autocratic government headed by a dictatorial leader, severe economic and social regimentation, and forcible suppression of opposition —Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary	After 1987, fascists didn't always exalt race above the individual, they just often did. I suppose that it was possible to be a fascist without being a racist.
1992: A system of government marked by centralization of authority under a dictator, stringent socioeconomic controls, suppression of the opposition through terror and censorship, and typically a policy of belligerent nationalism and racism —The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language	After 1992, a centralized autocratic government needed an actual dictator, not just a dictatorial leader, to be fascist. To exalt nation or race above the individual wasn't fascist. Only belligerent nationalism or racism was fascist. It was no longer fascist to merely employ forcible suppression of opposition. Suppression must be by the use of terror and censorship in order to qualify as fascism.
2020: 1. Any right-wing, authoritarian, nationalist ideology characterized by centralized, totalitarian governance, strong regimentation of the economy and of society, and repression of criticism or opposition. 2. (by extension) Any system of strong autocracy or oligarchy usually to the extent of bending and breaking the law, race-baiting, and/or violence against largely unarmed populations. —Wiktionary	In this definition, fascism is a right-wing, authoritarian, nationalist ideology. Left-wingers can't be fascists. Also, its centralized, totalitarian government has to break the law, engage in race-baiting, and commit violence against unarmed people. It isn't likely that most people would think that the United States of America matches this definition. The 1941 definition? Maybe so.