

THE SOUTH'S CONNECTION AND POLITICAL RESPONSE TO EUROPEAN  
FASCISM DURING THE INTERWAR PERIOD (1919-1939)

By

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## Abstract

### The South's Connection and Political Response to European Fascism During the Interwar War Period (1919-1939)

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This dissertation argues that the U.S. South's connections — commonalities, networks, and exchanges — and political response to European fascism were distinct from the rest of the United States during the interwar period. While the allegations of fascism levelled against the South by its critics were exaggerated, it was the U.S. region that most closely mirrored the racial, labour, and political practices of fascist Europe during the 1930s. These similarities underpinned the region's relatively affirmative political response to fascism as demonstrated by the discourse of southern politicians. Case studies illuminate how individual southern politicians engaged in the discourse of fascism both to undermine the more progressive elements of the New Deal and to protect the traditional racial, political, and economic social structures of the South. The South's distinct response to European fascism shifted U.S. domestic policy rightward and offered encouragement to European fascists via transnational exchanges.

The methodology for this thesis was informed by the nature of the questions being studied and the depth of the available historiography. A hermeneutical approach was utilized to interpret the interwar discourse to uncover insights on topics ranging from the nature of fascism to the South's political response. Comparative and transnational methods were deployed to understand the similarities and entanglements between the South and fascist Europe. The Congressional Record and the personal and professional papers of southern congressmen were foundational primary sources. Secondary sources utilized generally fell within one of three categories. First, those few texts that explicitly explore the connections between fascist Europe and the U.S. South; second, a much

larger body of work comprised of monographs that discuss the South and fascist Europe separately; and third, the new and emerging body of research on transnational fascism. The monographs provided background and context while the handful of sources on direct comparison and the exchange of ideas offered starting points from which to extend the historiography.

The South's connection to the interwar transnational fascist movement provides meaningful context to better understand the contemporary rise of right-wing populism. Southern symbols and ideas have metastasized and are now used globally by the right. The South may have been militarily conquered and its Jim Crow laws may have been banished, but the ideas and practices that underpinned the conception of the South as America's fascist region continue to manifest within the rising tide of global right-wing populist movements. In such ways the memories of the interwar South continue to shape understanding of current events and inspire actions in the present as well.

## Acknowledgements

The task of writing this dissertation seemed so overwhelming at first that five years later I can't imagine having completed it without the incredible support from a network of family, friends, and colleagues. As someone who only began to engage with history academically as a second career, after a long stretch working as an economist for the "Big Six" and in the energy industry, the idea of reinventing myself as a teacher and academic in my middling years seemed formidable. As a result of my non-traditional journey, it is my hope that the insights in this thesis are not only interesting in their originality but also diversity of thought.

I would not have had the gumption to tackle this project if not for the influence of my graduate thesis advisor, Dr. Jadwiga Biskupsa. In addition to being a role model of a clear thinker, she helped me select the right doctoral program and tapped her contacts in Yale's history department, including Glenda Gilmore, who provided advice at the front end of this project. Although it would have been easy to ignore the emails of a stranger, Robert Brinkmeyer, noted scholar of the South and fascism, provided the project with a shot of much needed momentum with his encouragement to pursue the topic. I feel incredibly fortunate to have had Drs. Klaus Richter and Nathan Cardon as my dissertation advisors. They were not only encouraging and patient, but also demonstrated profound expertise in European and American historiography, respectively. Perhaps the friendliest and most helpful people on the planet are the staff at libraries and archives, many of whom went out of their way to help me gather just that perfect piece of information. I could not have completed this project on schedule — especially given the extra hurdles COVID-19 created — without their kind assistance. Robert Borgström supported the project with his thoughtful comments on early drafts of each chapter. I am lucky to count him a friend over the years.

I would also like to thank my family for their encouragement. My parents consistently supported me on my educational journey from paying for my undergraduate degree so I could graduate debt free, to cheering my pursuit of graduate and post-graduate level degrees. When I asked my then thirteen-year-old son, Anthony, if I should pursue a doctorate, he replied, "Yes! It sounds cool." I hope the example of their 'old'

dad working nights and weekends has embedded a mental model in each of my boys around the importance of education and hard work.

Lastly, my greatest thanks go to my wife, Mindy Lee Pittman. You have made this project possible in so many ways that they are impossible to enumerate. As a native southerner, much to your family's unease, you broke convention and married a 'Yankee' some thirty years ago. For that and everything else I thank you — I can't imagine my life without you and I promise this will be the last degree!

# A NOTE ON LANGUAGE & ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE



Periodically throughout this dissertation, there are quotations from individuals who used offensive racial labels. I chose not to sanitize these historical statements but to present the authentic language of the period. I regret any offense caused by these crude idioms.

This dissertation was written prior to the advent of generative AI and thus represents one hundred percent human thinking.

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# 1. Introduction

An adoring crowd of over fifty thousand gathered in Gainesville, Georgia on March 23, 1938 to hear their beloved president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, dedicate a new town square, Roosevelt Square. It had been constructed to replace one devastated by a tornado two years earlier. Anticipating a convivial speech — after all, FDR often referred to Georgia as his “other state” and owned a vacation home in Warm Springs, Georgia — the crowd was shocked when instead the president lit into southerners and the South. Fed up by members of the southern congressional delegation who had recently blocked elements of his agenda, FDR declared, “Things will not come to us in the South if we oppose progress—if we believe in our hearts that the feudal system is still the best system. When you come down to it, there is little difference between the feudal system and the Fascist system. If you believe in the one, you lean to the other.”<sup>1</sup>

What did the president mean by making such a stinging claim that implied that the South was a bastion of fascism? Such language likely befuddled his southern listeners who prided themselves as being the most patriotic and God-fearing people in the country — surely poor soil to harbour a foreign ideology. Interwar Americans, informed by newspapers, movies, and literature, understood fascism primarily as an anti-democratic system prone to militarism that limited individual rights, with racism and the suppression of organized labour as secondary characteristics. Was it straight-talking or overwrought hyperbole to make such a characterization of the South?

FDR’s language, while new for him, was part of a wider and established discourse. It was not uncommon to hear a multitude of voices both in the United States and Europe make the same comparison. As early as 1931, the British journal *The Economist* compared the governing style of the Nazis to that of southern governors.<sup>2</sup> Authors including Sinclair Lewis and W. J. Cash pointedly alluded to the connections

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<sup>1</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, Address at Gainesville, Georgia, March 23, 1938, accessed via the American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/209547>; Susan Dunn, *Roosevelt’s Purge: How FDR Fought to Change the Democratic Party* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), 99-101.

<sup>2</sup> “The ‘Nazis’ in Trouble.” *The Economist*, April 11, 1931: 777.

between the South and fascist Europe.<sup>3</sup> But was the South really distinct in this regard? After all, the same claims of racism, limited voting rights, and the suppression of labour could be made to a greater or lesser degree of other areas of the United States. Was there really a special connection between the South and European fascism? And to the extent it was true, what were the ramifications for the country as a whole?

This thesis investigates the connections between European fascism and the U.S. South during the interwar period. These connections are explored in a variety of forms ranging from root causes to the transnational exchange of ideas. Going beyond describing and categorizing, the analysis focuses on identifying the causal relationships from which fascist practices manifested in order to understand the “how” and “why.” Set within the larger framework of the ongoing contest between liberalism and conservatism, Enlightenment ideas and traditionalism, the objective of this thesis is to answer two key questions. First, to what extent were there common causalities, shared practices, and a transnational exchange of ideas between fascist Europe and the U.S. South? In other words, was it a fair assessment to identify the South as America’s ‘fascist’ region? The second question deals with the South’s political response to European fascism, specifically the rhetoric and actions of southern politicians at the time. It considers the behaviour of southern politicians in response to fascism in order to understand how it differed from their non-southern brethren. And to the extent it was distinct, how did this distinction shape public policy both in the South and for country as a whole?

This dissertation engages with key questions relevant to a broad range of historiographical fields. Southern historians will be interested to understand how the long tradition of southern disparagement transformed with the advent of fascism, and how this discourse contributed to the breakdown of the region’s illiberal racial, labour, and political social structures. They will also be attentive to the new research presented on the South’s political response to fascism and how this played into the defence of traditional southern practices. Scholars of transnational fascism will value how this dissertation brings together the disparate research related to the entanglements between the South and

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<sup>3</sup> Sinclair Lewis, *It Can't Happen Here* (New York: Signet Classics, [1935] 2014), 132; W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Vintage Books, [1941] 1991), 134.

fascist Europe and adds to it utilizing new primary sources. Students of U.S. history will be interested by how national public policy was affected by the South's distinct political response to fascism. The findings from the methodological decision to focus on meso-elites also will be of notice. These mid-level politicians, pressed between the exigencies of national priorities and local level politics, diverged from the macro and micro level agents in their region in how they approached fascism. This insight may encourage further study of this social tranche in other contexts. U.S. historians will also find of interest how the disparagement of the 'fascist' South by northern liberals served as a scapegoat to provide cover to turn a blind eye to their own injustices; a wider application of the phenomenon pointed out by previously by Laura Edwards regarding the South's system of white supremacy.<sup>4</sup>

The exploration of these topics is especially pertinent to contemporary society given the intense forces currently battering the well-being of liberal democracies. In America, southern ideas once again represent the primary source of resistance to progressivism. While many of the South's traditional social structures have eroded down below the water line, they are in many cases still deeply embedded in the culture wrapped within the principles of libertarianism and states' rights. Southern symbols and ideas have metastasized and are now used globally by the right. The South may have been militarily conquered and its Jim Crow laws may have been banished, but many of the ideas and practices that underpinned the idea of the South as America's fascist region are now embraced by contemporary right-wing populist movements. In such ways the memories of the interwar South continue to shape understanding of current events and inspire actions in the present as well.

### **1.1. Historiography**

The connections between the U.S. South and European fascism are not well documented. The historical writing, to the extent it exists, generally adopts one of two approaches: comparative or relational. Comparative histories tend to emphasize the

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<sup>4</sup> Laura Edwards, "Southern History as U.S. History," *The Journal of Southern History* Volume 75, Number 3 (2009): 564.

common roots of fascist social structures and practices between the South and fascist Europe, while relational histories focus more upon the how the two regions interacted. Wolfgang Schivelbusch's book, *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery* (2004), is a comparative analysis that explored the shared reactions to defeat in post-Imperial Germany and the former Confederacy. Schivelbusch argued there was a pattern of common experiences and responses shared between the two regions and that the experience of a humiliating defeat dominated the development and actions of each defeated society.<sup>5</sup> With this line of inquiry, Schivelbusch incorporated the thesis of C. Vann Woodward who argued that the collective experiences of southerners — defeat, poverty and humiliation— fundamentally distinguished the South from the rest of the nation.<sup>6</sup> While Schivelbusch does a commendable job in analysing the commonalities between the two societies born out of humiliation and defeat, his analysis focused upon the nineteenth century South, making it an imperfect roadmap to help explain the rise of fascist thinking in the twentieth century. He also does not provide a thorough expatiation of the specific shared attributes between his case study examples — something this thesis does in detail by comparing the American public's interwar perception of fascism to the reality of the social structures of the South.

Beverly Mitchell's book *Plantations and Death Camp: Religion, Ideology, and Human Dignity* (2009), explored the similar oppressions visited upon Black Americans and Jews in the *antebellum* and Nazi eras respectively. Mitchell argued that the racist behaviour of southern planters and Nazis commonly was grounded in the concept of white supremacy. Plantation owners found their justification in the Christian Bible, while for fascists it was substantiated by the 'science' of eugenics.<sup>7</sup> Mitchell concentrated her study upon the shared experiences of those who experienced enslavement or concentration camps, providing only a cursory discussion of the motivations of the perpetrators. Another comparative history, Gabrielle Edgcomb's book, *From Swastika to*

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<sup>5</sup> Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery* (New York: Picador, 2004), 16.

<sup>6</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, [1960] 2008), 12-13.

<sup>7</sup> Beverly Mitchell, *Plantations and Death Camps: Religion, Ideology, and Human Dignity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 80-85.

*Jim Crow* (1993), tells the story of Jewish scholars who fled from the Nazi persecution to take positions teaching at historically Black colleges in the South. Edgcomb documented the similarities of racist oppression and persecution suffered by Jews in Germany and Black southerners in the United States. Like Mitchell, Edgcomb was mainly concerned with documenting shared experiences rather than contemplating causation.<sup>8</sup> Since both Mitchell and Edgcomb's books bear the distinguishing mark of being published by non-academic publishers, there is value in bringing greater academic rigor to the topics they addressed.

Another branch of the historiography deals with the transnational nature of fascism. Identifying fascism as a transnational instead of an international phenomenon is more than a semantic choice. International fascism implies a type of generic fascism that occurred across borders, while transnational fascism refers to the processes and arrangements that interacted and supported each other across national boundaries.<sup>9</sup> Some historians have suggested that European fascists were eager students of American methods of racial oppression and industry, and that one may conceive of the entire post-1918 totalitarian phase of European history as an attempt to raise Europe technologically and psychologically to the American level.<sup>10</sup> James Whitman explored this transnational impulse in his book, *Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law* (2017). Whitman documented the influence of America's immigration and Jim Crow laws on the genesis of the Nuremberg Laws, the centrepiece anti-Jewish legislation of the Nazi regime. The Nuremberg Laws were crafted in an atmosphere of considerable attention to the precedents American race laws had to offer.<sup>11</sup> Whitman's work was an extension of earlier scholarship, including Stefan Kuhl's *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics,*

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<sup>8</sup> Gabrielle Edgcomb, *Jim Crow: Refugee Scholars at Black Colleges* (Malabar: Krieger Publishing, 1993), ix-x.

<sup>9</sup> Sam Goodfellow, "Fascism as a Transnational Movement: The Case of Inter-War Alsace," *Contemporary European History* Vol. 22, No. 1 (February 2013): 87.

<sup>10</sup> Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat*, 388.

<sup>11</sup> James Whitman, *Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 78.

*American Racism, and German National Socialism* (1994), that traced the strong connection between the Nazis' racial theories and American eugenicists.<sup>12</sup>

Joseph Fronczak explored the opposite flow of influence — from Europe to America — in his article, “The Fascist Game: Transnational Political Transmission and the Genesis of the U.S. Modern Right.” Fronczak argued that fascist ideas were transmitted from Europe to the rest of the world in the 1930s through films and radio. Consumers of this media were exposed to fascist rituals such as the salute, uniforms, and slogans. He also explored how fascist ideas were imported to America by right-wing elites. For instance, a committee of Wall Street bankers commissioned a stock broker, Gerald MacGuire, to travel to Europe to learn about the interplay between veteran movements and fascism. Upon his return, he attempted to recruit U.S. Marine General Smedley Butler to lead a march of veterans on Washington D.C. to affect a fascist coup and overturn Roosevelt’s ‘socialist’ New Deal policies.<sup>13</sup> While transnational fascism was not the primary thrust of her research, Glenda Gilmore’s *Defying Dixie* (2009) offered many examples of mutual inspiration and the exchange of ideas between the South and Fascist Europe.<sup>14</sup>

The second major topic explored in this dissertation is the relative reaction of southern politicians to European fascism, and how their distinctive response influenced domestic politics. The historiography provides scant enlightenment regarding these questions. The most direct work to address this topic is a 1992 article, “The Nazis and the American South in the 1930s: A Mirror Image?” by Johnpeter Grill and Robert Jenkins in the *Journal of Southern History*. Their paper focused upon the reaction of the southern press to the rise of Nazi Germany. They found that while in general white southern newspaper editors decried Nazi anti-Semitism, they refused to acknowledge any similarities to southern racial practices. Black southern journalists, on the other hand,

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<sup>12</sup> Stefan Kuhl, *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 23.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Fronczak, “The Fascist Game: Transnational Political Transmission and the Genesis of the U.S. Modern Right,” *Journal of American History* 105, no. 3 (December 1, 2018): 564.

<sup>14</sup> Glenda Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York: Norton, 2008), 157-200.

drew explicit parallels. Grill and Jenkins also discussed Hitler's affinity for the South, from his appreciation of its racial policies to his enjoyment of *Gone with the Wind*. Grill and Jenkins detailed the South's rejection of Nazi overtures, and as a result European fascists were not able to gain traction in the South.<sup>15</sup> Grill followed up on this topic over a decade later in 2004 with a chapter in an essay collection, "The American South and Nazi Racism," in which he extended his analysis to include the reaction of southern religious journals. He found that while religious journals criticized anti-Semitism, they were more likely — especially Baptist periodicals — than their secular counterparts to blame Jews for being at least partially responsible for fostering an environment of anti-Semitism by their behaviour. Similar to the white secular press, the Protestant religious journals failed to connect their disapproval of fascist anti-Semitism to a disavowal of the Jim Crow South.<sup>16</sup>

Robert Brinkmeyer, a professor at the University of South Carolina, researched the reaction of southern authors and novelists to the rise of fascism in his book, *The Fourth Ghost White Southern Writers and European Fascism, 1930-1950* (2009). Brinkmeyer explored how fascism influenced the writing of southern authors, and how southern authors responded to critics of the South who disparaged the region as a bastion of fascism. Brinkmeyer found a range of responses in the writers he analysed based upon their political ideology. Liberal authors tended to leverage the fascist comparison to lambast their home region's social structures and argue for change. Conservative writers defended the South against the fascist comparison by arguing that traditional southern practices in fact were a bulwark protecting the best aspects of Western civilization against fascism.<sup>17</sup>

Brinkmeyer's work was influenced by the research of John T. Kneebone who made a deep study of the southern liberal press' response to the Civil Rights movement

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<sup>15</sup> Johnpeter Horst Grill and Robert L. Jenkins, "The Nazis and the American South in the 1930s: A Mirror Image?" *The Journal of Southern History* 58, no. 4 (1992): 668.

<sup>16</sup> Johnpeter Horst Grill, "The American South and Nazi Racism," Alan E. Steinweis, Daniel E. Rogers, eds. *The Impact of Nazism: New Perspectives on the Third Reich and Its Legacy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 19-34.

<sup>17</sup> Robert H. Brinkmeyer, *The Fourth Ghost White Southern Writers and European Fascism, 1930-1950* (Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 23.



and fascist Europe during the interwar period. Kneebone discovered that while liberal southern journalists were strong advocates of doing away with the excesses of racial ordering, as demonstrated by their exposes on lynching and the violent activities of the Ku Klux Klan, they did not support desegregation and many other goals of the Civil Rights movement. Keenly aware that too rapid change could contribute to a mood of public violence and rioting, they advocated for gradual reform.<sup>18</sup> The mainstream southern white press resoundingly rejected any comparison between the South and Nazi Germany. In defence of their home region, they pointed to South's reform approach to race relations (albeit gradual), as compared to the hard-line taken in fascist Europe.<sup>19</sup>

This thesis expands the scope of the investigation beyond the journalists, authors and theologians covered by Jenkins, Grill, Brinkmeyer, and Kneebone, to include southern politicians, a surprisingly understudied and significant group to these discussions. This thesis leverages the existing historiography in order to provide context for the distinct behaviours of southern politicians. By expanding the research to include the reactions of southern politicians, it is possible to ascertain how the South's political response to fascism influenced American domestic and foreign policy as well as contributed to the transnational fascist movement. Unlike previous discussions of transnational fascism involving the South in the historiography, this thesis goes beyond merely looking at cultural transfer, to understanding how these ideas mixed with domestic practices to shape the political discourse.

## **1.2. Terminology, Methodology, and Sources**

A note on the terminology used throughout this thesis. 'Ideology' is understood as "a system of collectively held normative and reputedly factual ideas and beliefs and attitudes advocating a particular pattern of social relationships and arrangements, and/or

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<sup>18</sup> John T. Kneebone, *Southern Liberal Journalists and the Issue of Race, 1920-1944* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), xiii-xx.

<sup>19</sup> Kneebone, *Southern Liberal Journalists*, 181.

aimed at justifying a particular pattern of conduct.”<sup>20</sup> In other words, ideology is understood as a system of beliefs that underpin a worldview. The term ‘social structure’ is used to represent human institutions in the broadest sense, and refers to a relatively enduring pattern of social arrangements or interrelations within a particular society, organization, or group.<sup>21</sup> The family, political organizations, the church, class and racial hierarchies are all examples of social structures. Social structures possess a degree of permanence and stability — they are durable and generally change slowly over time. Social structures inform the repertoire of acceptable practices available to a group. ‘Practice’ is defined as forms of human actions centrally organized around shared understanding.<sup>22</sup> Accepted practices delineate the boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate behaviour, and determine a group’s degree of freedom in reacting to any given situation.<sup>23</sup>

The term liberalism is used in the Enlightenment sense. Liberal is based on the Latin *liber*, an adjective denoting a free person. Liberal was used in the sixteenth century as a term with the meaning "free from restraint in speech or action."<sup>24</sup> Liberals believe in human agency and trust individuals to use reason to decide what is best for themselves. This ideology implies that society and government should be structured to provide individuals with rights in order to seek their own happiness — in a system called liberal democracy. Liberals share a belief that agency requires individuals to have economic and political rights enforced by institutions such as an independent legal system. Progressives

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<sup>20</sup> Malcolm Hamilton, “The Elements of the Concept of Ideology,” *Political Studies*, Vol.35, (March 1987): 38.

<sup>21</sup> Victor Gecas, “Value Identities, Self- Motives, and Social Movements,” in *Self, Identity, and Social Movements* eds. Sheldon Stryker, Tim Owens, and Robert White (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 93.

<sup>22</sup> Theodore Schatzki, *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*, edited by Theodore R. Schatzki, Karin Knorr Cetina, and Eike von Savigny (Hoboken: Routledge, 2000), 11.

<sup>23</sup> Joachim Häberlen, “Scope for Agency and Political Options. The German Working-Class Movement and the Rise of Nazism,” *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 14, no. 3 (September 1, 2013): 377–94.

<sup>24</sup> *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 1987), 237-238.

share many of the social justice goals of liberals, but are more inclined to sacrifice certain individual freedoms to achieve their objectives.<sup>25</sup>

Fascism, meanwhile, is often viewed as an antithesis to liberal democracy. Any discussion related to fascism inevitably raises definitional questions about the intrinsic qualities of fascism and who qualifies as a ‘fascist.’ While the historiography is extensive, attempts among scholars to develop a consensus definition for fascism as a political ideology remain controversial. To avoid getting mired in a dead-end definitional debate, this thesis considers fascism by empirical categories of practice rather than as an ideology. The criterion used is whether certain actors promoted practices that were commonly perceived as fascist by the interwar public rather than passing judgment on if they held a common set of beliefs and attitudes. As detailed in the next chapter, fascism was primarily understood by the interwar American public as a system of government that embraced dictatorship, militarism, and the abridgement of civil liberties, with a secondary emphasis on racism and hostility towards organized labour. It was the amalgam of these characteristics that interwar Americans implied when they used the label of ‘fascist.’

The methodology for this thesis was informed by the nature of the questions being studied and the depth of the available historiography. Fundamental to the research was the leveraging of big data in combination with hermeneutics. The digitization of large data-intense primary sources expands the sample set to the entire population. Previously undiscovered patterns and trends may now be discerned using big-data in conjunction with quantitative analysis. However, southern political discourse as raw data is unusable. In general, political rhetoric necessitates an interpretative approach due to its characteristic opaqueness. Southern political discourse, in particular, only becomes valuable data when understood within the context of southern social structures and how the South was perceived by non-southerners. Within hermeneutics, this is referred to as the ‘hermeneutical circle’: the idea that an interpreter must reference ‘the whole to

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<sup>25</sup> Travis Proulx et al., “The Progressive Values Scale: Assessing the Ideological Schism on the Left,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* (August 2023): 1248-1272.

understand the parts and the parts to understand the whole.’<sup>26</sup> In this case, the ‘whole’ is southern social structures considered within the context of a broader trans-fascist movement, while the ‘parts’ are the responses of southerners to both the allegation that they embodied fascism and to European fascism itself.

Another key methodological decision was the selection of meso-level historical agents as the primary area of focus. It is understood that macro-level agents include the highest-level political and business leaders — the ‘great man’ approach to history — while micro-level agents are everyday individuals. Meso-level historical actors are those individuals who form the lower tier of the elite: mid-level politicians, academics, writers, and business people. Meso, rather than macro-level agents, were selected for this analysis because of the precarious ground they inhabited — squeezed between the exigencies of local politics to protect illiberal southern practices and a nationalistic impulse to rally around the flag in reaction to European fascism. Priorities and motivations are best discerned at such stress points. Moreover, meso-agents as a group had the power to shape public policy and left behind enough historical data to enable longitudinal analysis and interregional comparisons.

Building off of Tore Olsson’s research on the post-Civil War South, comparative and transnational methods were utilized to understand the similarities and entanglements between the South and fascist Europe.<sup>27</sup> When examining the connections, ranging from root causes to the exchange of ideas, the focus was to go beyond just describing and categorizing, to identifying causal relationships. Philosopher David Lewis wrote, “Any particular event that we might wish to explain stands at the end of a long a complicated causal history.”<sup>28</sup> Kant considered the establishment of cause and effect as one of the

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<sup>26</sup> The name “hermeneutics” derives from the legendary Greek god Hermes who, as a messenger, bore knowledge and understanding between the Greek gods and the mortal realm. In the seventeenth century hermeneutics became associated with the interpretation biblical texts. Since then, a number of theologians and philosophers have developed variations of hermeneutic approaches for the application to other fields; Margo Paterson and Joy Higgs, “Using Hermeneutics as a Qualitative Research Approach in Professional Practice,” *The Qualitative Report* Volume 10 Number 2 (June 2005): 339-357.

<sup>27</sup> Tore Olsson, “The South in the World since 1865: A Review Essay,” *The Journal of Southern History* Volume 87, Number 1 (February 2021): 67-108.

<sup>28</sup> David Lewis, *Philosophical Papers Vol. II* (Oxford University Press, 1986), 214-215.

principal functions of human reason and fundamental to the understanding of history.<sup>29</sup> Ascertaining causal links was especially important to the questions being asked in this thesis in order to establish confidence that the relationships being examined were shaped by common antecedents and were not merely manifestations of spuriously correlated practices. The discursal data acquired in conjunction with the hermeneutical approach was evaluated using quantitative methods to uncover previously hidden relationships and to establish historical causality.

The sources used to uncover the connections between fascist Europe and the U.S. South were ascertained by a thorough vetting of the secondary literature, primary sources, and archival papers. Secondary sources generally fell within one of three categories. First, those few texts that explicitly explore the connections between fascist Europe and the U.S. South; second, a much larger body of work comprised of monographs that discuss the South and fascist Europe independently; and third, the new and emerging body of research on transnational fascism. The secondary sources examined span across a number of historical fields including: international history, political history, cultural history, sociological analysis, and intellectual history. Primary sources such as newspapers, journals, and congressional records were harvested for contemporaneous reactions and debates regarding fascism. Many newspapers from this period have been digitized and were accessible through online collections. The U.S. Congressional Record which contains the proceedings and debates of Congress, including floor speeches and votes was also accessed in digital format. The personal and professional papers of selected southern leaders — Martin Dies Jr., Hatton Sumners, Sam Rayburn — were mined for insights on how the southern political elite responded the rise of fascism and how their behaviour affected U.S. policy.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason* (Prabhat Books, [1781] 2008), 21.

<sup>30</sup> The Dies papers are housed at the Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center in Liberty, Texas. The Sumner papers are archived Dallas Historical Society Hall of State in Fair Park. Sam Rayburn's papers are stored Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at The University of Texas at Austin.

### 1.3. Organization

In order to answer the fundamental questions of this thesis, it was first necessary to establish a clear picture of how interwar Americans understood both European fascism and the South, and how these understandings affected the discourse. Chapter Two lays this foundation with a historiographical investigation of the interwar years and the rise of the authoritarian states — some of which became fascist. The origin stories of these European fascist states are analysed to form a basis for tracing parallels with the South. Since having a clear concept of fascism is pivotal to answering the fundamental questions addressed in this thesis — after all, what exactly is being implied by some interwar Americans when they claimed the South was a bastion of fascism — a brief exploration of the historiography regarding the controversies around how to define fascism is conducted. Starting with the few areas of agreement in the historiography, this chapter develops a concept of fascism by conducting an empirical look-back at the practices that were commonly perceived as being associated with fascism as presented in interwar American literature, film, and newspapers. Although the purpose was to reconstruct how Americans interpreted fascism rather than to enter the fray of scholarly debate regarding competing fascist definitions, this methodology, informed by the confluence of contemporary perception and historiographical consensus, is a new approach within the study of fascism, and could well serve as a promising investigative technique for the broader understanding of the essential nature of fascism.

Chapter Three presents the obverse side of the comparative history coin by pivoting away from fascist Europe to focus on the South. Like Chapter Two, the purpose of this chapter is to establish the foundation for a broader discussion of the South within the wider context of global fascism. A brief review of the historiography is conducted over the political, economic, and racial dimensions of the interwar South. It begins with the definition of the political geography of the South and proceeds with a rendering of the evolution of southern criticism. While the historiography of southern criticism is well established, it was insufficient to serve as a basis for answering the questions posed by this dissertation. It contains a gap regarding how criticism of the South evolved from general claims of backwardness into significant and persistent claims that the region mirrored many aspects of European fascism during the interwar period. This chapter fills

the hole in the historiography by detailing the development of this fascist charge along with its instrumentalization and effect on the South.

Chapter Four builds upon the foundations laid by the two previous chapters by evaluating the connections between fascist Europe and the U.S. South, including commonality of practice, common root causes, and the transnational exchanges of ideas. A key question being answered here is, “Did the South represent America’s fascist region?” during the interwar years as claimed by the region’s detractors. And if so, how so? This chapter breaks new ground by empirically testing an assumption held by interwar liberals — and vehemently denied by conservatives — that the interwar South was a bastion of fascist practices. A comparative analysis of southern and fascist social structures is performed along with an investigation of common historical bases. The genesis of commonalities is explored to understand both independent and dependent causes and correlation as well as transnational exchanges.

Chapter Five focuses on southerners’ political response to fascism. Specifically, how did southern politicians talk about fascism compared to their non-southern counterparts? What do the peculiarities of the southern discourse indicate about the South, and how did it impact national public policy? The scope of previous related work by Brinkmeyer and others focused only on writers, journalists, and theologians. This chapter breaks new ground by expanding the analysis to encompass the South’s political response and how that response shaped national politics. The work here also illuminates the intersection of the South as both a region of the United States and part of a larger movement of white superiority and reactionary politics during the interwar period. This section relies heavily upon discussions within the Congressional Record combined with a quantitative statistical analysis. The data extracted from of the Congressional Record was supplemented with other primary sources such as newspapers, periodicals, and speeches. Additional context was provided by monographs on individual politicians.

Chapter Six shifts focus from the overall southern congressional delegation to case studies of three influential southern politicians: Martin Dies Jr., Hatton Sumners, and Sam Rayburn. While some southern politicians used the discourse of fascism for their own personal aggrandizement, others deployed it as a strawman to defend the

South's traditional racial and economic structures and to stymie the more progressive elements of the New Deal. This chapter breaks new ground by providing a detailed look at how southerners operationalized the discussion of fascism to foster their agendas. Beyond providing insight into some of the individual motivations that collectively made up the southern pattern of behaviour, the case studies shed light on how southern politicians — who maintained that their region was the most 'American' in the country — 'squared the circle' when faced with similarities between 'un-American' European fascist practices and those in the South.

In the course of pursuing the main objective of this thesis — understanding the southern political response to European fascism — a number of other historiographical interventions were developed as foundational precursors. A perception-based practice focused conception of fascism was advanced using contemporary impressions along with historiographical consensus. The historiographical lacuna regarding how the allegation of southern fascism evolved from fringe labour activists to mainstream politicians was explained. Finally, an empirical analysis to determine the merits of the allegations against the South demonstrated that the loud and persistent claim by the region's liberal critics, and denied by southerners, that southern social structures closely resembled those established in fascist Europe is largely substantiated. Correspondingly, southern politicians exhibited a unique and differentiated behaviour as compared to non-southerners on the topic of fascism. To paraphrase Hans Gadamer's concept of a historically effected consciousness, southern politicians' understanding of the world was substantially shaped through the prejudices and the horizons in which they subsisted.<sup>31</sup>

Regarding the South's political response, this dissertation argues that it was distinctly affirmative compared to other regions of the U.S. While outwardly rejecting fascism as an un-American construct, the southern congressional delegation demonstrated itself to be, both through its discourse and actions, relatively sympathetic to the European fascist regimes as well as towards certain practices of fascism. Domestically, meso-level southern politicians engaged in the discourse of fascism to undermine the more progressive elements of the New Deal and to defend illiberal southern racial, labour, and

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<sup>31</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum, [1960] 1989), 254.



political practices. Transnationally, the South became intellectually and discursively entangled with fascist Europe. Considered *in toto*, the distinct southern political response to fascism connected the region to a global tide of white supremacy and illiberal governance during the interwar years.

## 2. European Fascism and American Perceptions

In contrast to present day historians who are caught in an endless argument about the essential nature of fascism and what countries were and were not fascist, many Americans during the interwar period were able to express a clear understanding of fascism informed by their consumption of popular literature and other media. As authoritarianism and fascism swept across Europe during the early twentieth century, the characteristics of these regimes were conveyed to Americans through movies, radio, newspapers, magazines and popular novels. As a starting point for exploring the bigger question regarding the connections between the U.S. South and fascist Europe, this chapter details how ordinary Americans perceived the practices of fascism. Specifically, what was being implied by the widespread and persistent claim made by many that the U.S. South represented America's 'fascist' region?<sup>32</sup>

The chapter starts with a brief discussion of the rise of the authoritarian states, some of which were fascist, during the interwar years. The origins of the European fascist states are analysed to form a basis for tracing parallels with socio-political developments in the South. The historiography of the essential nature of fascism is reviewed both to highlight the difficulties that have bedevilled scholars and also to extract those few areas of consensus. As opposed to engaging with fascism using a traditional essentialist method, the methodology used in this dissertation is perceptions-based. A concept of fascism is developed through an empirical look-back at the practices that were perceived by ordinary Americans as being associated with fascism. Even so, the essentialist historiography was not completely discarded. The few areas of agreement — such as the essential fascist states — served as the frame for the perceptions-based analysis.

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<sup>32</sup> For a more traditional discussion of essential nature of fascism, see Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*; Stefan Breuer, "Towards an Ideal Type of Fascism"; Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*; Aristotle Kallis, "The 'Regime-Model' of Fascism: A Typology"; George Mosse, *The Fascist Revolution: Toward A General Theory of Fascism*; and Zeev Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution*. For a discussion of individual regimes, see Ian Kershaw, *Hitler*; Richard Bosworth, *Mussolini*; Richard Bosworth, *Mussolini's Italy*; James Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator: Jozef Tiso and the Making of Fascist Slovakia*; Stanley Payne, *Franco: A Personal and Political Biography*; Corneliu Codreanu, *For My Legionaries*; Brian Porter-Szücs, *Poland in the Modern World: Beyond Martyrdom*; and Robert Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order*.

A characterization of fascism was constructed by weighting practices by frequency and emphasis as presented in the media and literature. This look-back revealed a number of surprises, such as how many Jewish-made films glossed over the anti-Semitic practices of fascism within Nazi Germany. This perception-based analysis of practices paints a clear picture of how interwar period Americans understood fascism and thus what was being implied when the South was accused of being America's 'fascist' region.

## **2.1. The Post-War Order and the Rise of Authoritarianism**

Authoritarianism supplanted approximately half of Europe's parliamentary democracies during the interwar years, including in Italy, Germany, and Spain.<sup>33</sup> Of the nine new countries carved out of the shattered Central Powers and Russian Empire in the wake of World War I — Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary, and Yugoslavia — seven of these adopted authoritarian governments within two decades of their founding.<sup>34</sup> Across Europe, parliamentary democracies crumpled under the stress of revolution, violence, and economic chaos that was rampant during the interwar period. In some cases, the authoritarianism in these countries manifested as a specific subset known as fascism. What accounted for Europe's embrace of authoritarianism and fascism?

The economic pain of the Great Depression, the threat of Bolshevism, and resentment against the provisions of the Paris peace agreements, combined to fire the crucible that shaped European authoritarianism during the interwar period. Some of these authoritarian states adopted fascism, a form of extreme nationalism. It was a transformation that was welcomed by many, especially in the middle class, as a defence mechanism to preserve their economic status and traditional values when the existing liberal democratic institutions were considered to be no longer adequate. It was for these

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<sup>33</sup> Nancy Bermeo, *Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times* (Princeton University Press, 2003), 21; Kurt Weyland, *Assault on Democracy: Communism, Fascism, and Authoritarianism During the Interwar Years* (Cambridge University Press, 2021), 4.

<sup>34</sup> Robert Gerwarth, *The Vanquished Why the First World War Failed to End* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016), 175, 253.

reasons that Polish historian Janusz Zarnowski described fascism “a form of dictatorship of the bourgeoisie”.<sup>35</sup>

Some historians have argued that these liberal democracies failed in a Darwinian fashion and were replaced by governments better suited to the times. Mark Mazower in his book, *The Dark Continent* (1999), posited that “fascism was the product of democratic decay.”<sup>36</sup> He contended that authoritarian systems such as fascism and communism claimed real support from the people as mechanisms to deal with problems that seemed intractable to the liberal democracies. Zara Steiner in her book, *The Lights that Failed: European International History 1919-1933* (2007), echoed this point, noting, “In 1931, men and women all over the world were seriously contemplating and frankly discussing the possibility that the Western system of society might break down and cease to work.”<sup>37</sup> President Roosevelt suggested that Europeans embraced fascism because they were tired “of unemployment and insecurity, of seeing their children hungry while they sat helpless in the face of government confusion.”<sup>38</sup> In other words, the adoption of fascism as a system of government did not represent an irrational fit of madness by the people of Italy, Germany, and other countries, but was rather a rational utilitarian decision in response to the dysfunction of liberal democracy.

Many Europeans welcomed an authoritarian executive to address economic problems born out of the Great Depression that seemed unsolvable to gridlocked parliaments. Leaders of the Soviet Union trumpeted their success in using central planning to keep unemployment low throughout the Great Depression. However, for many, the human cost of the Soviet economic model was too high as stories of famine, gulags, and purges leaked out of the east. Fascist governments offered a ‘third way’ between capitalism and Stalinism. Sometimes described as monopolistic capitalism, Italy and Germany both expanded the power of the state in the economy, instituted large scale

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<sup>35</sup> Janusz Żarnowski, *State, Society, and Intelligentsia: Modern Poland and Its Regional Context* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2003), 131.

<sup>36</sup> Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 17.

<sup>37</sup> Zara S. Steiner, *The Lights That Failed: European International History, 1919-1933* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 636.

<sup>38</sup> Susan Dunn, *Roosevelt's Purge: How FDR Fought to Change the Democratic Party* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 103.

infrastructure projects, and crushed the power of labour unions in order to ameliorate unemployment. These economic policies, by some measures, enabled the fascist states to outperform democratic-capitalist countries during the Great Depression.<sup>39</sup> By 1938, the economies of both Germany and Italy were operating near full employment; unemployment was just three percent in Germany — compared to nineteen percent in the US, thirteen percent in the United Kingdom, fourteen percent in Belgium, and twenty-five percent in the Netherlands.<sup>40</sup>

Fascism also appealed as a defence against Bolshevism. The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia after 1917 introduced to Europe — and to the world — a dramatic, revolutionary, ‘leftist’ political idea that caused waves of reaction across European society. Among these reactions was a flowering of centre-right and right-wing movements, including fascism. Popularized by street campaigns against Marxists in Milan and Trieste and later in the agricultural areas of the Po Valley in 1919-1920, Italian Fascism was welcomed by both domestic and international conservative elites as a bulwark against communism.<sup>41</sup> The idea of fascism as a vaccine against Bolshevism was widely accepted during the interwar period. Jewish Congressman Sirovich from New York declared on the floor of Congress, “for the rise of fascism, Marx alone is responsible...fascism is a reaction to communism and the historical experience of the last twenty years bears out this thesis. Mussolini was the answer to Lenin and Hitler the response to Stalin.”<sup>42</sup> One-time Soviet leader, Leon Trotsky, argued that fascism was the bourgeois response to the threat of communism. He wrote, “At the moment that the “normal” police and military resources of the bourgeois dictatorship, together with their parliamentary screens, no longer suffice to hold society in a state of equilibrium — the turn of the fascist regime arrives.”<sup>43</sup> Historian Robert Paxton agreed that fascism was

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<sup>39</sup> Dunn, *Roosevelt’s Purge*, 671.

<sup>40</sup> Mazower, *Dark Continent*, 132.

<sup>41</sup> Michael Ebner, *Ordinary Violence in Mussolini’s Italy* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 27.

<sup>42</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1937, Volume 81 Part 6:6004.

<sup>43</sup> Leon Trotsky, “What Is Fascism and How to Fight It”, a compilation of essays written between 1930-1940, accessed via Marxists.org.

inimical to Bolshevism when he described it as a “dictatorship against the Left – amid popular enthusiasm”.<sup>44</sup>

The decisions made in the wake of World War I as part of the Paris Peace Conference were another major factor of the rise of authoritarianism — and fascism by association — in interwar Europe. Populations and territory were shifted between states. Reparations were mandated and war guilt was assigned. The defeated European nations and colonial populations resented the selective application of Wilson’s principle of national self-determination. They were granted little agency in the post-war order, and even the newly created states favoured by the allies, such as Poland and Czechoslovakia, were subject to rather humiliating minority treaties that impinged upon their sovereignty. For example, millions of Germans were transferred out of German territory with the creation of the Polish Corridor and Danzig as a free city. The German population in Upper Silesia was also transferred away from Germany even though the local population had voted in a plebiscite to remain with Germany. All in all, approximately thirteen million Germans and three million Hungarians were placed outside of Germany and Hungary respectively as a result of the Paris agreements. Austria lost over four million German speakers to newly formed Czechoslovakia and was prohibited *Anschluss* with Germany as part of the Treaty of Saint-Germain.<sup>45</sup> Colonial populations also were slighted by the process. Ho Chi Minh and W.E.B. DuBois were ignored when they petitioned Wilson’s advisors for national self-determination for Vietnam and Germany’s former African colonies respectively in 1919.<sup>46</sup>

The choices made at the end of World War I by the victors generated a stubborn irredentist sentiment among the defeated powers. While newly created ethnic minorities were promised protection by a series of minority treaties pressed upon states by the Paris decision makers, the treaties, while well-intentioned, generated resentment all around and

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<sup>44</sup> Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 20.

<sup>45</sup> Gerwarth, *The Vanquished*, 175-213.

<sup>46</sup> Letter from Nguyen ai Quac [Ho Chi Minh] to Secretary of State Robert Lansing 6/18/1919, 851G.00, General Records, 1918 – 1931, Records of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace, Record Group 256, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD; Ian Tyrrell, *Transnational Nation: United States History in Global Perspective Since 1789* (New York: Palgrave, 2015), 175.

failed to prevent discrimination.<sup>47</sup> Lack of faith in the League of Nation's legalistic mechanisms to enforce these treaties for the protection of minorities fuelled ethnic irredentism among the defeated powers. British Prime Minister Lloyd George recognized the danger when in 1919 he prophetically uttered, "I cannot conceive of any greater cause of future war than that of the German people, who have certainly proved themselves one of the most vigorous and powerful races in the world, should be surrounded by a number of small states many of them consisting of people who have never previously set up a stable government for themselves, but each of them containing large masses of Germans clamouring for reunion with their native land."<sup>48</sup>

The decision to mandate large reparation payments from the defeated Central Powers was another destabilizing factor that was born out of the Paris Peace Conference. The issue of reparations dealt a tremendous blow to the reputation of the Weimar Republic. Reparations undermined its domestic popularity, led to the disastrous French occupation of the Ruhr Valley, and contributed to Germany's ruinous hyperinflation of 1923 — all of which was high-octane fuel that fired Hitler's ascendancy to the Chancellorship. French vengeance — catalysed by the humiliation of the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71) and the devastation wreaked upon France's districts during the World War I — is most often painted as the driving factor for the 'crushing' reparations baked into the Versailles Treaty. Some historians such as Adam Tooze blame the United States' pecuniary stubbornness for the reparations problem. Tooze argued that the United States' demand to be fully repaid for war loans painted France into a corner, and it had no choice but to demand high reparations from the Germans. The U.S. rebuffed repeated requests from the French and British to link a reduction of reparations to inter-allied debt relief.<sup>49</sup> The American's position on debt repayment was summed up concisely by President Coolidge when he stated, "They hired the money, didn't they?"<sup>50</sup> So wedded was the U.S. to the principle of full repayment, it took the collapse of the global economy

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<sup>47</sup> Gerwarth, *The Vanquished*, 218.

<sup>48</sup> Adam Tooze, *The Deluge: The Great War, America and the Remaking of the Global Order, 1916-1931* (NY: Penguin Books, 2015), 285.

<sup>49</sup> Tooze, *The Deluge*, 298-373.

<sup>50</sup> Steiner, *The Lights That Failed*, 38.

before an inter-allied debt and reparations moratorium was agreed to in 1931.<sup>51</sup> The seemingly intractable and linked issues of Allied debt and reparation payments undermined the global interwar economic order. President Hoover opined in his memoirs that the debt-reparations cycle was a major contributor to the Great Depression and World War II.<sup>52</sup>

There were a number of other decisions made by the leaders of the Paris Peace Conferences that undermined the stability of the post-war order. Italy, although one of the victorious major powers, was left frustrated and angry in the final settlement of territories. In exchange for joining the war against the Central Powers, Italy was promised Austrian and Ottoman lands in the secret London Agreement of 1915. Blocked from being granted all the land it was promised, Italians came to regard the outcome of the war as a “mutilated” victory. The Japanese too felt slighted by the Paris Peace Conference as a result of their marginalization in the decision-making process and because their petition for a ‘racial equality’ clause in the Covenant of the League of Nations was blocked by the British and Australian delegations.

While international historians may debate the wisdom of how the peacemakers went about their business, one thing that they all do agree upon was that the outcome of the peace settlements of 1919 was disastrous. Extremism and war swept Europe in the decades that followed. What is unclear is whether or not it is reasonable to consider a different result given the circumstances. Margaret MacMillan in her book *Peacemakers: The Paris Conference of 1919 and Its Attempt to End War* (2001), argued that the leaders of the Big Three — Woodrow Wilson, Lloyd George, and Clemenceau — were bound by public opinion and had to consider how their decisions would impact the outcome of the next domestic election.<sup>53</sup> Under this frame of reference, it is understandable why Wilson (and his Republican successors Warren Harding and Calvin Coolidge) would not cancel inter allied war debts; Congress and the American people would not stand for it. The

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<sup>51</sup> Tooze, *The Deluge*, 496.

<sup>52</sup> Herbert Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: The Cabinet and the Presidency 1920-1933* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1951), vi, 181.

<sup>53</sup> Margaret MacMillan, *Peacemakers: The Paris Conference of 1919 and Its Attempt to End War* (London: J. Murray, 2001), 6.



contingency of domestic politics also illuminates France's punitive stance towards Germany. The French, unlike the Americans or the British, were concerned about the future security threat posed by a recovered Germany — a problem unique to them given their proximity to Germany and the loss of allied Russian armies on Germany's eastern flank as a result of the Bolshevik Revolution. World War I revealed that once again, like in 1870, the French were vulnerable to German power. This feeling of vulnerability greatly informed France's demands in shaping the Versailles Treaty. While Wilson had the luxury of standing on the principles of the Fourteen Points, Clemenceau was forced to press for *realpolitik* measures for the protection of France.

The British, represented by Prime Minister Lloyd George at the Paris Peace Conference, were also guided by their own domestic objectives. Lloyd George aimed to punish Germany but not to the point that it would fail as a trading partner and as a check to French power on the continent. The British had far less to fear and more to gain from a revitalized Germany than France. Wilson came to Europe with vision for a new world order based on his Fourteen Points, but even though the United States stood as the most powerful country at the end of the war, Clemenceau and Lloyd George dominated Wilson in shaping the outcome of the Peace Conference; very little of Wilson's vision, other than the League of Nations, materialized.<sup>54</sup>

The perceived unfairness of both the provisions and process of the Paris Peace Conference created unintended lingering deep resentment throughout central and Eastern Europe as well as Japan. These resentments, enflamed further by the Great Depression and the ongoing threat of Bolshevik revolution, were an important catalyst for the violence that wracked interwar Europe.<sup>55</sup> As a result, one democratic government after another toppled as the people of these nations conceived that the dangers facing them were only to be overcome by the replacement of parliamentary debate with authoritarian decisiveness. Fascism was presented as a means for saving civilization in the face of these nation shattering threats. However, unlike Cincinnatus who took up the dictatorship to save Rome but then quickly returned to his fields after the threat had

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<sup>54</sup> Steiner, *The Lights That Failed*, 22, 34, 40.

<sup>55</sup> Gerwarth, *The Vanquished*, 220-221.

passed, the fascists did not intend to solve the immediate crises and then cede power back to democracy. Their aim was to fundamentally reshape their nations and the international order.

## 2.2. Fascist Ideology and Practice

The historiography on the nature of fascism and its ideology is wrapped in a Gordian knot of competing theories (and has been for over the last fifty years).<sup>56</sup> Some scholars even maintain that fascism as a typology should be abandoned.<sup>57</sup> This dissertation holds that such a position is too fastidious. Typologies are justified by their utility. During the interwar years, there were a number of political regimes born out of violence that rejected both democratic liberalism and Marxism, and were ruled by glorified leaders who were willing to substantially subvert civil liberties for the promotion of nationalist grandeur. A term to cover the subclass of authoritarian regimes with these characteristics is useful and justified. In order to bypass the conceptual morass surrounding the historiographical debate of the essential nature of fascism, this thesis takes the approach of utilizing contemporary interwar perceptions as the bedrock for defining fascism. These perceptions form the basis for an empirical analysis of fascism out of which a topography of fascist practices is mapped to analyse the U.S. South within the larger context of European fascism.

Given the confusion within the historiography, it is not surprising that there is no standard comprehensive list of the fascist states. However, there is enough consensus to identify the *essential* fascist states even though the category lacks clearly defined parameters. In other words, informed observers “know it when they see it.”<sup>58</sup> Using this criterion, the historiographical consensus is that both Mussolini’s and Hitler’s respective

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<sup>56</sup> Roger Griffin, "The Primacy of Culture: The Current Growth (Or Manufacture) of Consensus within Fascist Studies," *Journal of Contemporary History* 37, no. 1 (2002): 21-43.

<sup>57</sup> Gilbert Allardyce, "What Fascism Is Not: Thoughts on the Deflation of a Concept," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 84, No. 2 (Apr., 1979): 370; Kevin Passmore, *Fascism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 19.

<sup>58</sup> Similar to the criteria used by the U.S. Supreme Court in the 1964 case *Jacobellis v. Ohio* for recognizing hard core pornography.

regimes were the essential fascist states. George Mosse contended that European fascism “was largely dominated by Italian fascism and German National Socialism.”<sup>59</sup> This position, that “Italy and Germany constitute the acid test for any typology of fascism” is argued by a phalanx of respected mainstream social scientists including Janusz Żarnowski, German historian Stefan Breuer, and British historian Aristotle Kallis.<sup>60</sup> Of course, not everyone agrees. Zeev Sternhell, a Polish-born Israeli historian, claimed, “Fascism can in no way be identified with Nazism” because in his view Nazism was fundamentally based on racial determinism.<sup>61</sup>

As the Victorian poet G.M. Young once opined, “the central matter of history is not what happened, but what people thought, and said about it.”<sup>62</sup> In this spirit, the historiographical consensus of essential fascist states was validated by cross-referencing it with contemporary interwar perceptions. As demonstrated later in this chapter, interwar American public opinion unequivocally understood Germany and Italy as the exemplars of fascism. The confluence of the historiographical and contemporary data sets provides the logical basis for categorizing Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany as the two core fascist states. Starting with this locus point, a concept of fascism is developed through an empirical look-back at the practices commonly associated with Mussolini’s and Hitler’s regimes as understood by ordinary Americans. This methodology reifies the clutter of opaque historiographical arguments into a useable concept of fascism. Although the purpose was to reconstruct how Americans interpreted fascism rather than to enter the fray of scholarly debate regarding competing fascist definitions, this methodology represents a novel approach, and could well serve as a promising investigative technique for the broader understanding of the essential nature of fascism. This method was deemed

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<sup>59</sup> George Mosse, *The Fascist Revolution: Toward a General Theory of Fascism* (Howard Fertig, 2000), 2.

<sup>60</sup> Janusz Żarnowski, *State, Society, and Intelligentsia: Modern Poland and Its Regional Context* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2003), 125; Stefan Breuer, "Towards an Ideal Type of Fascism," *Max Weber Studies* 8, no. 1 (2008): 13; Aristotle Kallis, "The 'Regime-Model' of Fascism: A Typology," *European History Quarterly*, January 2000, Vol.30(1), 80.

<sup>61</sup> Zeev Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 4.

<sup>62</sup> Quoted in John P. Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism: The View from America* (Princeton University Press, 1972), ix.

especially appropriate for addressing the major questions being explored in this thesis since they are related to the perception of similarity between the practices of the South and European fascism.

### **2.3. American Perceptions of European Fascism**

While the vast majority of interwar Americans may have been ignorant of the intricacies of fascist theory, they did have a clear perception of what fascism meant in practice. To paraphrase Nietzsche, ‘facts do not exist, only interpretations.’ One way that Americans interpreted and understood fascism was through their participation in community meetings, such as those sponsored by the Rotarians. Rotary, the largest secular service organization in the world, kept its membership informed by hosting expert speakers at its meetings. The organization was also positioned to disseminate first-hand accounts gathered by its German chapters before they were shut down by the Nazis in 1937 despite their proactive expulsion of all Jewish members.<sup>63</sup> While such public presentations were a commonplace means of sharing information in the pre-Internet era, far more influential in shaping Americans’ perception of fascism were the depictions presented by the mass media of movies, books, and newspapers.

How individuals reacted to the information presented to them was, of course, filtered by their worldview. Liberals, Jews, and African Americans were often at the forefront of decrying both Mussolini’s and Hitler’s regimes, while, at the same time, many other Americans were positive to neutral on Mussolini and Hitler through the mid 1930s. Even so, as the decade progressed, there was an increasingly negative perception of these fascist regimes across the American population.

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<sup>63</sup> “Waco Rotary President’s Letter 1939-1940,” Rotary Collection, Boxes Uncategorized, Mayborn Museum at Baylor University; Tyrrell, *Transnational Nation*, 179; “Germany Rotary Disbands,” *New York Times*, September 1, 1937, 5.

### 2.3.1. Motion Pictures

Motion pictures, even though constrained to some degree in their messaging by Nazi meddling and Hollywood industry standards, reflected and informed Americans' understanding of European fascism. During the 1930s, the content of American films was regulated by the Hays Code, a self-imposed industry set of guidelines, that was enforced by the Production Code Administration, an organization under the auspices of the industry association, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America. The Code prohibited many types of political and satirical messages in films, and required that the "history, institutions, prominent people and citizenry of other nations be represented fairly."<sup>64</sup> The German foreign ministry was another source of censorship that limited the negative representation of Nazi Germany in films. During the interwar years, Nazi diplomats held sway over Hollywood by threatening to evoke Article Fifteen of German film quota law of 1932 that stipulated a studio would be banned from the lucrative German movie market if they produced any film "detrimental to German prestige." Warner Brothers studio was the first casualty of this law when it was shut out of the lucrative German film market in 1934 after it failed to edit its film, *Captured!*, as requested by Nazi government.<sup>65</sup> Thereafter, the other major studios, even though most of them were run by Jewish businessmen, adhered to Nazi's demands that included censoring content and firing Jewish workers in Germany.<sup>66</sup> Despite these barriers, there were a handful of films screened during the interwar period that both influenced and illuminated public opinion on the topic of European fascism.

The first widely viewed movie in the United States covering fascism was Columbia Pictures' documentary *Mussolini Speaks* released in 1933. The film was a seventy-four-minute tribute praising Mussolini that highlighted Italy's progress under ten years of Fascism; its sunny portrayal of Italian fascism obviated any concerns over Hays

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<sup>64</sup> Maltby, Richard. "Appendix 1: The Motion Picture Production Code (as Published March, 31 1930)," In *Hollywood Cinema*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 593–97; "The End of American Film Censorship," *JSTOR Daily*, February 28, 2018.

<sup>65</sup> Ben Urwand, *The Collaboration: Hollywood's Pact with Hitler* (Harvard University Press, 2013), 48, 58.

<sup>66</sup> Over half of the movie production companies in the 1930s, and almost all the major ones, were led by Jews, see Urwand, *The Collaboration*, 62.

Code violations. Narrated by the popular U.S. radio broadcaster Lowell Thomas, the film lauded Mussolini as a savvy manager of Italy's economy and an enlightened patron of the arts. Representing Mussolini as an agent of modernity, Lowell proclaimed, "these are the times when a dictator comes in handy."<sup>67</sup> The film also favourably depicted Mussolini's achievements including the Lateran Pact between Italy and Vatican and the completion of major engineering achievements such as irrigation projects in the deserts of Libya and the draining of the Pontine Marshes in Italy.<sup>68</sup> The film was viewed by over 175,000 people during its first two weeks.<sup>69</sup> *Mussolini Speaks* was an anomaly insofar as it was the only mainstream pro-fascist movie to achieve popularity in the United States.

Once Hitler came to power there were no more favourable films highlighting the wonders of European fascism. In fact, just the opposite. Herman Mankiewicz, who would later author *Citizen Kane*, wrote a virulently anti-Nazi screenplay called *The Mad Dog of Europe* in 1933 that highlighted the persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany. Despite arousing significant interest from producers, the film was never made as a result of resistance from both the Hays Committee and the major Hollywood studios that were worried about the consequences of making such a film on their businesses in Germany.<sup>70</sup> The failed example of *The Mad Dog of Europe* set the tone for Hollywood for the next six years. While Hollywood eschewed making films that discussed fascism for most of the 1930s, by the end of the decade the wall began to crack and films that addressed the topic began to make their way to the big screen. As an avid consumer of Hollywood films, Hitler understood the power of movies to persuade and evoke emotions. Greatly irritated by the prospect of an actively hostile Hollywood, Hitler decried what he viewed as the unfair portrayal of Nazi Germany in 'Jewish made' films.<sup>71</sup> He mentioned his unhappiness with 'Jewish' Hollywood during his infamous January 30, 1939 speech to

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<sup>67</sup> *Mussolini Speaks*, written by Lowell Thomas (1933, Columbia Pictures Corp.), Archive.org.

<sup>68</sup> "Il Duce," *New York Times*, March 13, 1933.

<sup>69</sup> Doherty, Thomas Patrick. *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930–1934* (New York: Columbia University Press 1999), 77.

<sup>70</sup> Urwand, *The Collaboration*, 65-75.

<sup>71</sup> Of the eighty-five Hollywood producers engaged in production during the 1930s, fifty-three were Jews, see Urwand, *The Collaboration*, 63.

the Reichstag — the speech where he explicitly threatened to exterminate the Jewish population of Europe.<sup>72</sup>

The first of the unfriendly movies prophesized by Hitler came in the form of true story spy thriller, *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, released by Warner Brothers in May 1939. It was the first film from a major studio to be directly and unashamedly anti-Nazi. Warner Brothers had the least to lose of all the major studios in producing an anti-Nazi movie, since it was forced to close its operations in Germany in 1934 as a result of an Article Fifteen violation for refusing to make cuts to its anti-German movie *Captured!*<sup>73</sup> The movie was inspired by the real-life FBI investigation in 1938, known as the Rumrich Nazi spy case, that resulted in the arrest and prosecution of four Nazi spies who were working to steal U.S. technology and gather sensitive military information.<sup>74</sup> The script encountered resistance from the Production Code Administration (for treading in the grey area of the Hays Code) as well as other Hollywood studios. Germany, after all, was a lucrative film market and there was hesitation to anger the Nazis. As part of a deal to get the movie approved, the producers of *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* agreed that they would avoid any mention of anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany.<sup>75</sup> The plot revolved around a network of Nazi spies based in United States that worked to proselyte the tenets of National Socialism and steal U.S. military secrets.

The film vociferously portrays Nazis as enemies of the United States — over two years before the U.S. would be at war with Germany. What accounts for the strident anti-Nazi tone of the film? The film director, Anatole Litvak, was a Jew who was born in the Ukraine in 1902 and raised in St. Petersburg, Russia.<sup>76</sup> Litvak worked in Germany from the mid 1920s through the early 1930s, at which point he relocated to France on the eve

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<sup>72</sup> Adolph Hitler, *Hitler: Speeches and Proclamations, 1932-1945, Vol. 3 - The Chronicle of a Dictatorship* edited by Max Domarus (Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, January 1997), 1456.

<sup>73</sup> Urwand, *The Collaboration*, 58.

<sup>74</sup> The Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Rumrich Nazi Spy Case*, fbi.gov.

<sup>75</sup> David Green, “This Day in Jewish History, 1940: Three Stooges' Hitler Satire 'You Nazty Spy' Premieres,” *Haaretz*, January 19, 2016.

<sup>76</sup> Vincent Brook, *Driven to Darkness: Jewish Émigré Directors and the Rise of Film Noir* (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 9.

of the Nazi takeover.<sup>77</sup> He was a well-known for his anti-Nazi attitudes. Actor Edward G. Robinson described Litvak as “surely one of the most urbane, sophisticated, gourmet, haute monde, anti-Nazis ever known.”<sup>78</sup> Warner Brothers’ Jewish leadership was impressed with Litvak’s previous work and offered him a contract for six movies in 1936 – the fifth of which was *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*.<sup>79</sup>

*Confessions* painted a highly derogatory picture of fascism by highlighting Nazis’ disdain for democracy as well as the civil liberties enshrined in the U.S. Constitution. In one scene, after some World War I veterans condemn National Socialism at a German Bund meeting, they are deprived of their right of free speech when they are beat up by German-Americans dressed as Storm Troopers. Nazis in the film suggest that concentration camps are a good solution to deal with those who put their desire for individual rights ahead of National Socialism. The Gestapo is portrayed as a menacing organization that is ready to use state sanctioned violence against anyone disloyal to the Führer. The effectiveness of terror in keeping an entire population in check through fear is shown when a hairdresser informs upon one of her customers and it is made clear the traitor and her family will be violently suppressed.<sup>80</sup>

Pro-Nazi characters are represented as blood-thirsty militarists who are excited by the Hitler’s plans to expand German territory through armed action. Even though blocked from addressing anti-Semitism directly by the Hays Code, the writers worked in material that conveyed the Nazis’ eugenics worldview, with dialogue that derided the concept of racial equality and referred to Jews as subhuman criminals in charge of an international conspiracy to start another world war. The film imparted a clear portrayal of fascism as system that was hostile to civil liberties, anti-democratic, militaristic, and racist. Such was the strength of the messaging that some discarded the film as agitprop. The *New York*

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<sup>77</sup> Brook, *Driven to Darkness*, 197.

<sup>78</sup> Michelangelo Capua, *Anatole Litvak: The Life and Films* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2015), 102.

<sup>79</sup> Warner Brothers was founded in 1923 by the four Wonskolaser brothers: Hirsch, Abraham, Szmuel, and Jacob who had emigrated along with their parents eastern Europe. The brothers Anglicized their names to Harry, Albert, Sam, and Jack, see Brook, *Driven to Darkness*, 198; Urwand, *The Collaboration*, 63.

<sup>80</sup> *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, directed by Anatole Litvak (1939, Warner Brothers).



*Times* film critic wrote that Litvak had crossed over into propaganda with the caricature of the German fascists in his film.<sup>81</sup>

The most commercially successful film that addressed fascism was Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* (1940) in which Chaplin satirized fascism and its highest profile leaders, Hitler and Mussolini. *The Great Dictator*, was written and filmed in 1938-39 and premiered in October 1940. It turned out to be Chaplin's most financially lucrative film, and was the second-most popular movie in the U.S. in 1941.<sup>82</sup> The film represented a turn in opinion for Chaplin who earlier in the decade had written favourably about fascism. In a memoir documenting his travels of 1931-1932, *A Comedian Sees the World* (1933), Chaplin wrote admiringly about the discipline and order he observed in Italy. Chaplin praised Mussolini for sparking a new purpose and unity among the Italians proclaiming, "he took a nation and put it to work," and even attempted to meet Mussolini in person while in Italy. Charlie also spoke approvingly of British fascist leader, Sir Oswald Mosley, naming him "one of the most promising young men in English politics."<sup>83</sup> Despite this earlier flirtation with fascism, like many western Europeans and Americans, Chaplin's appreciation for fascism and fascist leaders faded by the mid 1930s.<sup>84</sup> Chaplain's turn of opinion was compatible with his left-of-centre political inclinations. He supported socialist Upton Sinclair for his run for the California governorship in 1934, and spoke positively about the spread of communism. Eventually, his far-left sympathies would be the cause of his forced exile from the United States.<sup>85</sup>

Chaplin relentlessly satirized fascism in *The Great Dictator*. Chaplin presented the treatment of Jews in Germany with the character of a Jewish barber who lived in a Jewish ghetto. The barber (played by Chaplin), is indiscriminately beat up and arrested

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<sup>81</sup> "The Warners Make Faces at Hitler in 'Confessions of a Nazi Spy'," *New York Times*, April 29, 1939.

<sup>82</sup> "Film Money-Makers Selected by Variety: 'Sergeant York' Top Picture, Gary Cooper Leading Star", *New York Times*, December 31, 1941: 21.

<sup>83</sup> Charlie Chaplin, *A Comedian Sees the World* (University of Missouri, [1933] 2014), 85, 124.

<sup>84</sup> Chaplin was a British citizen, but he had been living in the States for almost thirty years when he wrote, directed, and starred in the film.

<sup>85</sup> Richard Carr, *Charlie Chaplin A Political Biography from Victorian Britain to Modern America* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 49, 181, 195, 221, 245.

by Nazis who are also shown looting and murdering other Jews. The one ‘good’ Nazi in the film, Colonel Schultz, is sent to a concentration camp for trying to defend Jews against this abuse. The Hitler character (also played by Chaplin), gives a speech about Jews so hateful that the microphones into which he speaks literally recoil in horror.<sup>86</sup>

The film also criticizes fascists as militarists. The Hitler character’s lust for conquest is satirized at one point by showing him seductively dancing with a balloon globe of the world. The Hitler character gets so aroused when the Goebbels character (pronounced ‘garbage’) tells him that he will be king of the world, that he scurries up a curtain in excitement. The film hits on a number of other fascist social structures such as labour policy and civil liberties. Workers are portrayed as being forced to work long hours for low pay. The Hitler and Goebbels characters decry democracy, liberty, and freedom of speech. The Goebbels character approvingly notes that thousands of Germans are being sentenced to concentration camps every week for complaining about conditions in Germany. In the closing moments of the film final, Jewish barber pleads with the Nazis to reverse course and shape a different destiny, urging them, “Don't fight for slavery! Fight for liberty!”<sup>87</sup> By order of emphasis, the themes that were addressed in Chaplain’s film were: anti-Semitism, militarism, anti-labour policies, and the repression of civil liberties.

Another American comedy film that provided commentary on European fascism during in the interwar period was the Three Stooges’ *You Nazty Spy!* which was written after the invasion of Poland and premiered early in January 1940. While it began filming after Chaplin’s *The Great Dictator*, it arrived in theatres nine months earlier, as a result of its shorter length and lower production value (shot over five days). The Three Stooges — Moe (Moses Horowitz), Larry (Larry Feinberg), and Curly (Jerome Horowitz), occasionally joined by Shemp (Samuel Horowitz) — were all Jewish. The Horowitz brothers were born to a middle-class Jewish immigrant family in Brooklyn. As not

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<sup>86</sup> *The Great Dictator*, written and directed by Charlie Chaplin (1941, Charles Chaplin Film Corp).

<sup>87</sup> The final speech in *The Great Dictator*.

uncommon at that time in Hollywood, each of the Horowitz brothers Anglicized their last name — in this case to Howard.<sup>88</sup>

Using a silly and simplistic plot *You Nazty Spy!* thoroughly lampooned Hitler, his top lieutenants, and Nazism. The plot revolves around the actions of a group of greedy arms merchants who in the pursuit of war profits, overthrow the legitimate government of the fictional country of Moronica ('Moronica for Morons' is the national motto — a satire of the Nazis' '*Deutschland den Deutschen*') and install one of the Stooges, Moe, as a 'useful idiot' as the dictator. The other two Stooges are given supporting roles: Curly is declared the Field Marshal (representative of Hermann Goering), and Larry is tapped to be the Minister of Propaganda (representation of Joseph Goebbels).

Militarism is the main theme satirized. Moe demands a blitzkrieg to conquer Moronica's neighbours, and then gives a Hitleresque rant in German. At a peace conference the Stooges' demand land from the surrounding countries and resort to violence when their demands are not met. The trio jokes about the killing of civilians as Moronica's armies conquer territory. Moe, as the Hitler character, grabs a globe and declares that the world belongs to him as he is chased around a table by the leaders of other countries. The violation of civil liberties was the next most mentioned theme. A series of jokes revolve around the burning books and the fate of an innocent man being sent to a concentration camp and threatened with death. Dictatorship is the third characteristic of fascism represented. It is presented as parasitic form of government that offers nothing to the people other than empty promises. Surprisingly, given the Jewish heritage of the Stooges, the film did not highlight any aspect of racial intolerance or anti-Semitism. Perhaps the writers felt restrained by the Hays Code. Although avoiding making explicit statements about the racial policy of the Third Reich, the Stooges subversively used Jewish humour throughout the film to mock the Nazis. Even though the Stooges aimed for laughter, their film conveyed some interesting insights regarding how Americans understood fascism with its portrayal of dictatorship, militarism, the violation of civil liberties.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Threestooges.com.

<sup>89</sup> The Three Stooges, *You Nazty Spy!* directed by Jules White (Columbia Pictures, 1940).

*The Mortal Storm* (1940) was a fourth film produced by Hollywood during the interwar years that was critical of fascism. The film attempted to highlight anti-Semitism but never mentioned the word ‘Jew’ and as a result only seven percent of the audience registered its anti-Semitic message.<sup>90</sup> Set in Germany in 1933, the film primarily explored the rise of violence and the erosion of civil liberties under National Socialism.<sup>91</sup> It is ironic that of the four major films that criticized fascism during the interwar period, the one that did the most to highlight anti-Semitism was made by Charlie Chaplain, a non-Jew (even though he was often mistaken for a Jew).<sup>92</sup>

Considering at the aforementioned films collectively, the main ideas conveyed about fascism were its disregard for civil liberties, militarism, and dictatorship. Anti-Semitism and racial concerns came next. While it seems plausible that the reluctance to focus on anti-Semitism in these films was a result of Nazi influence in Hollywood and the Hays Code, credit must also be attributed to Americans’ attitudes regarding race. The first rule of entertainment is to be entertaining. Racial justice was not a top-of-mind consideration for most Americans during the interwar period — a time when a majority of white Americans believed Black people were congenitally of subpar intelligence, and over two-thirds agreed that Jews should *not* have equal rights and opposed desegregating schools or having a Black neighbour.<sup>93</sup> The Civil Rights Movement was still a long way away in the 1930s.

### 2.3.2. Literature

Novelist Sinclair Lewis provided one of the earliest pictures of how fascism was perceived in the United States in his book, *It Can’t Happen Here*. Written and published in 1935, *It Can’t Happen Here* quickly became a national best seller. A key source for

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<sup>90</sup> Urwand, *The Collaboration*, 217.

<sup>91</sup> *The Mortal Storm*, directed by Frank Borzage (1940, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corp).

<sup>92</sup> Holly Pearse, “Charlie Chaplin: Jewish or Goyish?” *Jewish Quarterly* Volume 57, Issue 2 (May 2013): 38-42; *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, “Is Charlie Chaplain a Jew?” March 18, 1931.

<sup>93</sup> Rita Simon, *Public Opinion in America: 1936-1970* (Chicago: Rand McNally Publishing, 1974), 57-63, 84.

Lewis's understanding of fascism was his second wife, Dorothy Thompson, a journalist who had interviewed Hitler and wrote a series of articles on the Nazis between 1931 and 1935. Ideologically, Sinclair Lewis was an atheist and a socialist sympathizer who had participated in Upton Sinclair's socialist commune for a time.<sup>94</sup>

The plot of *It Can't Happen Here* revolves around a homegrown authoritarian, Senator Buzz Windrip (modelled after Senator Huey Long of Louisiana), who challenged and defeated Franklin Delano Roosevelt for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1936. After Windrip wins the presidency, he transforms America into a dictatorship with the help of a paramilitary group that used violence to achieve political aims known as "Minute Men." The new government formed a corporate state that eliminated independent unions and enriched big business.<sup>95</sup> Basic freedoms were eliminated, including: the freedom of speech, press, assembly, and *habeas corpus*. Black people were entirely disenfranchised and along with Jews were subjected to economic discrimination. Labour and concentration camps were established for the unemployed and political prisoners. Lewis presented fascism as a repressive system that undermined the fundamental American principles of democracy, civil liberties, and racial justice.<sup>96</sup>

The book, *Writers Take Sides*, published in 1938 offers a data rich view into American writers' perception of fascism. The book was a collection of responses to a survey sent out by The League of American Writers to four hundred and eighteen of its members with the question, "Are you for or against Franco and Fascism?" The League of American Writers was created in 1935 by the American Communist Party as an

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<sup>94</sup> Sinclair Lewis, *It Can't Happen Here* (New York: Signet Classics, [1935] 2014), vi.

<sup>95</sup> Corporatism is the theory and practice of organizing society into 'corporations' subordinate to the state. Under corporatism, the state creates vertically structured alliances of employers and workers, Corporations. A key objective is the drawing together of workers and owners for the cessation of class warfare and strikes. Towards this end, the Fascists corralled independent labor unions and replaced them with state sanctioned unions. In a corporatist state, Fascists argued that there was no need for an independent labor movement since the state would guarantee the rights of the workers. Corporatism was first implemented widely in Italy under Mussolini's Fascist party in the 1920s and perhaps best represents the 'third-way' ideology of Fascism as a path neither capitalist or socialistic. It was considered by many to be the crowning achievement of the Fascist project and was widely admired for a time by F.D.R. and his head of the New Deal's National Recovery Administration, James Whitman, "Of Corporatism, Fascism, and the First New Deal," *The American Journal of Comparative Law* 39, no. 4 (1991).

<sup>96</sup> Lewis, "The Fifteen Points of Victory for the Forgotten Men," *It Can't Happen Here*, 61.

association of American novelists, playwrights, poets, journalists, and literary critics for the purpose of resisting fascism. Of the 418 writers surveyed, 255 responses were received and printed. Given the group’s providence, it is not surprising that the members’ replies reflected an overwhelming negative perception of fascism. Ninety-eight percent favoured the leftist Loyalists and opposed Franco with the remainder either neutral or in favour of Franco (one reply).<sup>97</sup> Not every writer provided specific reasons for their dislike of fascism — many just responded that they found it objectionable and were cheering for the Loyalists. However, the responses of those who justified their answer with a rationale, illuminate how the writers perceived the social structures of fascism.

**Table 1:  
League of American Writers: Perceived Characteristics of Fascism**

Anti-Democratic / Dictatorial	34%
Anti- Modern and Intellectual	23%
Hostile to Civil Liberties	19%
Militaristic	14%
Anti-Labour	5%
Racist / Anti-Semitic	5%
Total	100%

As the table above indicates, the most common complaint among those surveyed about fascism was its anti-democratic nature and embrace of a dictatorial form of government. One indicative reply stated, “As one who has never lost his faith in democracy, I am naturally and inevitably opposed to fascism.”<sup>98</sup> The second most prevalent objection about fascism was that it was anti-intellectual and anti-modern as indicated by George Seldes’ comment, “Fascism is the enemy of culture. Fascism is the enemy of progress and civilization.”<sup>99</sup>

The surveyed authors also castigated fascism for its militarism. H.W.L. Dana refers to Germany, Italy, and Japan as “invaders”. The *New York Times*’ Moscow

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<sup>97</sup> The League of American Writers, *Writers Take Sides* (Concord: The Rumford Press, 1938), foreword.

<sup>98</sup> The League of American Writers, *Writers Take Sides*, 16-18.

<sup>99</sup> The League of American Writers, *Writers Take Sides*, 20, 37, 53, 65, 67.

correspondent, Walter Duranty, expressed that fascism presents the, “gravest risk [for a] new world war through callous disregard [of] established principles of international comity.”<sup>100</sup> Fascism’s hostility to organized labour and racism tied for the next rank. John Steinbeck associated fascism with anti-unionism. He wrote, “We have our own fascists out here [in the agricultural fields of California]. They haven’t bombed open towns yet but in Salinas last year tear gas was thrown in Union Hall and through the windows of workingmen’s houses.” Samuel Yellen asserted, “fascism has meant the oppression of workers and farmers in Italy.” Surprisingly, few writers emphasized the fascist regimes’ embrace of racism or anti-Semitism. Most of the few comments about racism that were made came from Black or Jewish authors, even while other Black and Jewish authors surveyed made no mention.<sup>101</sup>

The overall results of the writers’ survey are predictable in some ways and surprising in others. By far, the most comments touched upon the writers’ support for democracy and civil liberties. This is commonsensical from a group that makes their living by freedom of expression. A surprise was that there were very few mentions of fascist inspired racial discrimination and anti-Semitism. Perhaps this was due to the fact that the question was framed in the context of the Spanish Civil War, and racial ordering was not an important part of Franco’s Nationalist movement.

Despite the lopsided results presented by the writers’ survey and highly pejorative portrayal of fascism in *It Can’t Happen Here*, not all American literati were opposed to fascism. Perhaps the most eclectic American defender of European fascism was the distinguished poet, Ezra Pound. He had helped launch the careers of T.S. Eliot, Ernest Hemingway and James Joyce as well as mentoring the poet Yeats who was twenty years his senior. Pound’s admiration for Mussolini and fascism blossomed after he and his wife Dorothy settled in Italy in 1924. Pound saw Mussolini not only a statesman who had overthrown plutocracy, but also someone who had made politics an art form.<sup>102</sup> Inspired

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<sup>100</sup> The League of American Writers, *Writers Take Sides*, 19, 29, 54.

<sup>101</sup> The League of American Writers, *Writers Take Sides*, 17, 34, 56, 67.

<sup>102</sup> David Moody, *Ezra Pound: Poet: Volume II: The Epic Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 137-138.

by Mussolini as a man of action who was able to restore Italy and put it back to work, he met with Il Duce in January 1933 to discuss poetry and economics. Stimulated by this interaction, he wrote *Jefferson and/or Mussolini* in February 1933. In this work, Pound represented Mussolini as a builder an artist, one that was able go beyond conceiving of an enlightened social but actually to will it into existence. Pound concluded, “the Fascist revolution was FOR the preservation of certain liberties and FOR the maintenance of a certain level of culture, certain standards of living.”<sup>103</sup> For Pound, the benefits of Fascism to Italy far outweighed the ‘accidentals’ of dictatorship and *confinos*.

Interestingly for a poet, Pound took a keen interest in economic policies, especially the problems of low wages, high unemployment, and foreclosures brought about by the Great Depression. He admired the economic policies of Mussolini and Hitler and regarded the Rome-Berlin Axis as a welcome counterweight to the power of international bankers. In his 1935 essay “What is Money For?” he quoted Hitler, “the struggle against international finance and loan capital has become the most important point in the National Socialist programme; the struggle of the German nation for its independence and freedom.”<sup>104</sup> He blamed capitalist interests for encouraging wars so that governments would accrue debts, and admired the fascist states for pushing back against “parasitic demands” of international finance.<sup>105</sup> He praised Hitler and Mussolini for their effectiveness in getting needed goods out the people — in contrast to the Roosevelt’s administration’s policy to pay farmers to destroy crops and livestock in an effort to increase prices as part of the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933.<sup>106</sup> Pound articulated his economic and political ideas through his writings and radio program throughout the war. After the war, Pound was captured and imprisoned by the American military on charges of treason. After repatriation to the States, he was committed to an insane asylum in Washington D.C. where he considered himself to be a political

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<sup>103</sup> Ezra Pound, *Jefferson and/or Mussolini* (London: Stanley Nott Ltd, 1935), 127.

<sup>104</sup> Ezra Pound, *What is Money For?* (London: Peter Russell, 1935),12.

<sup>105</sup> Pound described usury, the lending of money for interest, as “a vice, a crime, condemned by all religions and every ancient moralist” *Gold and Work* (London: Peter Russell, [1944] 1951), 12; Ezra Pound, *America, Roosevelt and the Causes of the Present War*, (London: Peter Russell, [1944] 1951).

<sup>106</sup> Ezra Pound, *What is Money For?*, 7.



prisoner.<sup>107</sup> He was eventually released in 1958 and returned to Italy where he delivered a fascist salute upon his return to Italian soil.<sup>108</sup>

Joining Pound as an advocate of fascism was Harvard educated thinker Lawrence Dennis. Dennis who was Black but passed as white as an adult, admired fascism for its ideas, unlike those like famed aviator, Charles Lindbergh, whose support for fascism was partially rooted in racial logic.<sup>109</sup> Dennis, named by *Life* magazine as “America’s number one intellectual fascist,” laid out his vision for fascism in America in his books *The Coming American Fascism* (1936) and *The Dynamics of War and Revolution* (1940).<sup>110</sup> Historian Arthur Schlesinger described Dennis as the “one intellectual” who “brought to the advocacy of fascism the powers of intelligence and style which always threatened to bring him...into the main tent.” Dennis’ embrace of fascism was unusual considering his background. As a child he was a popular ‘Negro’ child preacher who, escorted by his African American mother, toured nationally and around the world. However, after completing high school and before entering Harvard University, Dennis chose to abandon his family and his identity as a mixed-race individual in order to pass for white. His biographer, Gerald Horne, posited that Dennis’ experiences growing up in the Jim Crow South as a ‘mulatto’ turned him against the U.S. system of governance and into an advocate of fascism.<sup>111</sup>

Dennis was impressed by the fascist states’ apparent relative economic performance compared to the liberal democracies during the Great Depression. Dennis praised the how effective the economic policies of fascist Germany and Italy were in

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<sup>107</sup> Eustace Miller, *Ezra Pound: This Difficult Individual* (Hollywood: Angriff Press, 1961), Amazon Kindle Location 102.

<sup>108</sup> Humphrey Carpenter, *A Serious Character: The Life of Ezra Pound* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988), 848.

<sup>109</sup> Lindberg considered the technology of aviation “specially shaped for Western hands” and only inferiorly copied by non-whites, see Charles Lindberg, “Aviation, Geography, and Race,” *Readers’ Digest* Vol. 35 (November 1939): 64-67.

<sup>110</sup> *Life Magazine*, “The Ism of Appeasement,” January 20, 1941, 25-26; Lawrence Dennis, *The Coming of American Fascism* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishing, 1936); Lawrence Dennis, *The Dynamics of War and Revolution* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishing, 1940).

<sup>111</sup> Gerald Horne, *The Color of Fascism: Lawrence Dennis, Racial Passing, and the Rise of Right-Wing Extremism in the United States* (New York University Press, 2006), xi – 25.

maximizing production and reducing unemployment through state intervention and planning. These policies combined with the dismantling of independent labour unions, substantially reduced unemployment although at the cost of lower real wages.<sup>112</sup> Dennis argued for governments to make decisions that would organize the economic priorities to serve the nation first, in lieu of a free market system where consumers, workers, and producers have the latitude to determine how to utilize the factors of production.<sup>113</sup> Dennis also admired fascism's rejection of democracy. He considered it unwise to give everyone, especially those of low intellect, an equal say in the governance of the country. Instead, he preferred the fascist system that delegated decision-making to a 'more capable' elite.<sup>114</sup> Dennis' admiration for fascism did have limits though, most notably on the topic of racial justice, as he was vocal in his support for equal rights for persons of all races.<sup>115</sup>

Looking across the variety of views presented by interwar authors, there are a number of themes that emerge. Overall, they were preoccupied with the triumph of dictatorship over democracy and the associated suppression of civil liberties and workers' rights. Many liberal authors perceived fascism as a retrograde movement — a throw-back to feudal times. Conservative writers, on the other hand, celebrated the authoritarian 'firm hand on the tiller' aspect of fascism as a means to stabilize societies and improve their economic performance. When liberals decried the injustice of one-party politics, the repression of labour, and racial inequality, conservatives argued that such restrictions were necessary to maintain control over the South's relatively large Black population and as a strategy to alleviate the region's poor economic circumstances.

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<sup>112</sup> In Italy, real wages fell by an estimated 10 percent between 1928 and 1936 in Italy, compared with rising real wages for workers during this same time period in the United States, see Schivelbusch, *Three New Deals*, 26; Bosworth, *Mussolini's Italy*, 228; Michael D Bordo, Christopher Erceg and Charles Evans, "Money, Sticky Wages, and the Great Depression," *The American Economic Review* 90, no. 5 (2000): 1447-463; and Mazower, *Dark Continent*, 132.

<sup>113</sup> Lawrence Dennis, *The Coming American Fascism* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1936), 180.

<sup>114</sup> Dennis, *The Coming American Fascism*, 244.

<sup>115</sup> Horne, *The Color of Fascism*, xviii.

### 2.3.3. Mainstream Press

The American mainstream press provided rather complementary coverage of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy up to Italy's invasion of Ethiopia and the passage of the Nuremberg Laws in Germany in 1935, and then sporadically as late as up to the *Kristallnacht* in 1938. Mussolini was the first to receive good press from American journals and papers. Mussolini's accession to power was reported positively by many mainstream papers and journals and his Fascists were praised as a positive force for restoring law and order to Italy and as an antidote to parliamentary incompetence and to the societal disorder incited by the Bolsheviks. Even America's most authoritative liberal newspaper of record, *The New York Times*, endorsed Mussolini's Fascist coup with headlines such as "An Italy Transformed" and "A Great Wave of Patriotism Re-unites All Classes Under Mussolini."<sup>116</sup> Mussolini continued to receive positive press even after his followers murdered his political rival, Giacomo Matteotti, and Mussolini's subsequent imposition of a dictatorship in Italy.<sup>117</sup> The *Saturday Evening Post*, the most widely read periodical in the United States at the time with a weekly circulation of over two million, was an ardent defender of Mussolini under its editor Richard Washburn Child, an ex-ambassador to Italy. The *Post* defended Mussolini throughout the Matteotti affair and later serialized Mussolini's autobiography in 1928, with Child describing Mussolini as "wise and humane."<sup>118</sup> Even FDR expressed admiration, writing in 1933, "I am much interested and deeply impressed by what he has accomplished and by his evidenced honest purpose of restoring Italy and seeking to prevent general European trouble." And to America's Ambassador in Rome John Lawrence, "I am keeping in fairly close touch with that admirable Italian gentleman."<sup>119</sup> American businessmen also favourably perceived Mussolini through the mid 1930s, judging him as an effective instrument in

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<sup>116</sup> "Italy Transformed; Money, Gems, Work Given to State," *New York Times*, January 1, 1923.

<sup>117</sup> Giacomo Matteotti was an opposition leader in the Socialist Party. He was kidnapped outside of his house on 10 June 1924 and killed. An investigation revealed that his murderers were Fascist *squadristi* operating under the orders of one of Mussolini's personal aides, see Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism: 1913-1945*, 114.

<sup>118</sup> Benito Mussolini, *My Autobiography*, with an Introduction by Richard Child (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1928), xix.

<sup>119</sup> Diggins, 279.

Italy's economic recovery that would benefit them through increased international trade.<sup>120</sup>

William Randolph Hearst, perhaps the most influential newspaper publisher of the time, provided favourable treatment to both Mussolini and Hitler in his papers through the mid 1930s. Hearst solicited and ran regular columns from Mussolini, Hitler, and Hermann Goering in his "March of Events" section published across the Hearst family of papers during the early 1930s. These fascist leaders wrote articles that were aligned with Hearst's views around the injustices caused by and perniciousness of the Versailles Treaty. Hearst praised Hitler for restoring order out the lingering chaos caused World War I. When Hearst met with Hitler in person in September 1934, he questioned him about the persecution of Jewish Germans. Hitler disavowed past incidents of discrimination and pledged that there would be fewer going forward. Hearst, satisfied on this account, was impressed with Hitler's vision to restore the balance of power to Europe and suppress the spread of communism. After his meeting with Hitler, he directed his editors to rein in negative stories about the Nazis, and in 1935, published an editorial defending the Nazis' violation of the Versailles arms provisions, and solicited both Hitler and Goering to draft a defence of the Nazis' actions that would be printed in the Hearst papers. In 1936, he pressed his editors to publish a highly favourable interview with Hitler. Hearst's favourable treatment held until the *Kristallnacht* in November 1938 after which he and his papers turned negative.<sup>121</sup>

It may have been Hearst's abhorrence to organized labour that made these dictators feel like kindred spirits for a time. Hearst was staunchly anti-labour and anti-New Deal especially when these interests affected the newspaper industry and his personal finances. He engaged in the mass firing of employees who attempted to organize into a writers Guild under section 7a of the National Recovery Act (which guaranteed employees the right to collectively bargain). His anti-labour position reinforced his intrinsic distaste for Bolshevism, as American communists were energetically engaged in

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<sup>120</sup> Gian Diacomio Migone, *The United States and Fascist Italy: The Rise of American Finance in Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 37-41.

<sup>121</sup> David Nasaw, *The Chief: The Life of William Randolph Hearst* (New York: Mariner Books, 2001), 388, 471-474, 499-518.

organizing a newspaper union. In 1934, he ordered his editors to engage in an open-throated attack on American and international communists. His journalists, some disguised as students, exposed American left-wing professors and agitated for their firing. Hearst warned the Hollywood studios about 'red propaganda' in their films and they listened. His papers printed detailed accounts of the misery and starvation occurring in Stalin's Russia, although sometimes unknowingly using doctored photos. He labelled Roosevelt's New Deal tax program as "essentially communism."<sup>122</sup>

American progressives responded by orchestrating an extensive economic and ideological counterattack against Hearst. These opponents used their media outlets to paint Hearst as a fascist for his support of Mussolini and Hitler and his opposition to organized labour and the New Deal. For instance, the African American *Wyandotte Echo* published out of Kanas City condemned Hearst as a fascist for his writings on the restriction of civil liberties, anti-labour policies, and the promotion of militarism.<sup>123</sup> Hearst responded to the charge that he was a fascist by writing in 1934, "Whenever you hear a prominent American called 'Fascist,' you can usually make up your mind that the man is simply a loyal citizen who stands for Americanism."<sup>124</sup> His opponents called for a boycott of all Hearst publications. Upton Sinclair made personal attacks on Hearst charging him as an adulterer by outing his long-time affair with mistress Marion Davies. His enemies floated a rumour that Hearst had been bribed by a Hitler with \$400,000 to provide the Nazis good press — a charge that persisted into the 1940s hurting Hearst's business interests. Driven by the boycotts, financial distress gripped publishing empire. Hearst turned his attention to salvaging his situation and quieted his pro-fascist editorial voice, although remained resolutely anti-communist throughout the Spanish Civil War.<sup>125</sup>

Even after the anti-Semitic and military aggressive nature of the German and Italian states respectively became more widely recognized, it was not uncommon for these regimes to continue to receive favourable treatment from mainstream American

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<sup>122</sup> Nasaw, *The Chief*, 492-518.

<sup>123</sup> "American League Against War and Fascism. National Anti-Hearst Drive Launched," *Wyandotte Echo*, March 5, 1937, 1.

<sup>124</sup> Lewis, *It Can't Happen Here*, Introduction by Michael Myer, ix.

<sup>125</sup> Nasaw, *The Chief*, 509, 511, 551.

periodicals between 1936-1937. *National Geographic* ran a series of complementary stories featuring Germany under the Nazis and Fascist Italy in 1937. The February 1937 article “Changing Berlin” provided an unabashedly favourable portrayal of Hitler’s Berlin. It spoke approvingly about the modernizing change happening in Berlin. The city was presented as a well-ordered healthy environment, now bereft of slums and with a world class transportation system. Several pictures of a large admiring crowds celebrating Hitler’s birthday and attending a Hitler speech were featured. The Hitler Youth were favourably portrayed as well as the idea of race-fortifying eugenic policies. German youth were represented as healthier, happier, and more sober under National Socialism.<sup>126</sup>

The March 1937 article “Imperial Rome Reborn” was similar in praiseworthy tone and content in its description of Mussolini’s Italy: the country is presented as modernizing and brighter under Fascism, Italian youth are more active and athletic, pictures depict the adulation by crowds Mussolini. The author named Mussolini as a “Modern Caesar” and suggested he was restoring the glory of the old Roman Empire. Jewish Italians were interviewed and quoted as stating, “here [in Italy] I feel more equality than I ever knew.” The author pointedly rejected the accusations of civil rights abuses in the *confinos*, stating, “Yet I cannot believe even after visiting Roman prisons, that political prisoners suffer physical cruelty in Italy today.”<sup>127</sup> *Life Magazine* presented a relatively neutral account of Hitler’s rise to power in a December 1936 article, before turning outwardly hostile towards German and Italian fascism in 1938.<sup>128</sup> Even the somewhat left leaning *Atlantic Monthly* was neutral-to-positive on Hitler and Mussolini through 1936.<sup>129</sup> Reciprocally, the Nazi press favourably covered FDR through 1937.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Douglas Chandler, “Changing Berlin,” *National Geographic Magazine* Volume LXXI No. 2 (February 1937): 131-170.

<sup>127</sup> Joe Patric, “Imperial Rome Reborn, *National Geographic Magazine* Volume LXXI, No. 3 (March 1937): 269-325.

<sup>128</sup> “Biography of a Dictator: The Rise of Adolf Hitler . . . . from his birth in 1889 to his deification in 1933,” *Life Magazine* (December 1936, Vol. 1 Issue 3): 21.

<sup>129</sup> “The New Romulus and the New Rome,” *The Atlantic*, July 1928; “Hitler and Hitlerism,” *The Atlantic*, April 1932; “Italy and Europe,” *The Atlantic*, August 1936; “The Passive Barbarian,” *The Atlantic*, September 1940.

<sup>130</sup> James Whitman, *Hitler’s American Model* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2017), 6.

Press relations soured in 1938, and the Italian government banned publications like the *New Republic*, *Esquire*, *Collier's* and *Time*.<sup>131</sup>

#### 2.3.4. African American Press

African American newspapers provided a far different perspective on European fascism compared to the white dominated mainstream press. African American papers were some of the earliest and loudest critics of European fascism, often in articles that compared the restriction of civil liberties in fascist Europe to the Black experience in the United States. A Black travel writer, after visiting Italy in 1927, criticized the crack down on free speech and press under Mussolini and compared the lawlessness of Black Shirt squad violence to the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>132</sup> In 1933, the *Wyandotte Echo* condemned the new Nazi regime for its anti-Black racism, writing, “African Negroes brought to Germany from German colonies under the old regime and who had served in the German army were mistreated, intimidated and howled at by Hitlerites...[who also] carried on a wide campaign to drive Negro actors and musicians off the stage in Germany.” It was further noted that the Nazis were persecuting Jews, labour organizers, and Black people.<sup>133</sup> In 1934, the *Plaindealer* condemned the Nazis for crushing the German labour movement and exercising influence on the direction of the German Lutheran Church.<sup>134</sup> Fascism became even less popular among African Americans in 1935 as a result of Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia (Abyssinia). The *Cleveland Gazette* described Italian Fascism in action as “bloody, brutal, and vicious.”<sup>135</sup> The consensus within the Black community

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<sup>131</sup> Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*, 318.

<sup>132</sup> J.A. Rogers, “Well-Known Author and Journalist, Describes Incidents of Travel on Tour of European Lands,” *The Negro World*, May 21, 1927, 1.

<sup>133</sup> “Hitler Smells of Ku Klux Klanism,” *Wyandotte Echo* (Kansas City, Kansas) April 14, 1933, 1.

<sup>134</sup> “Texas Sees Great Danger in Fascism. White Texan Says Negro Will be Victim of Thug Rule If Fascism.” *Plaindealer* (Kansas City, Kansas) XXXVI, no. 48, November 30, 1934: [1].

<sup>135</sup> “Fascism Here and There,” *The Cleveland Gazette*, January 19, 1935, 2.

that fascism was inimical to the interests of Black people led the NAACP in 1939 to pledge its support to help persecuted minorities in fascist Germany and Italy.<sup>136</sup>

## 2.4. Conclusion

Fascism was a utilitarian response by Europeans to the instability brought about by the Great Depression, Bolshevism, and the contentious provisions of the Paris Peace Conference. Many liberal democracies, especially those newly founded, were unable to manage these stresses through parliamentary methods and resorted to forms of authoritarianism including fascism. While contemporary scholars continue to disagree about the fundamental nature of fascism, its characteristics were crystal clear to the interwar public through its consumption of movies, literature, and newspapers.

Fascism was most commonly presented in literature and by the media as characterized by dictatorship, restricted civil liberties, and militarism. Racism and anti-labour policies were presented as secondary characteristics. Not surprisingly, these themes had a strong correlation with the results of public opinion polls. A 1945 opinion poll that queried, “What does fascism mean to you?” Dictatorship was the most commonly perceived characteristic followed by the suppression of civil liberties, racism, corporatism, and militarism.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> “NAACP to Fight Nazism and Fascism; Wants America to Make Democracy Work Here,” *Negro Star*, January 20, 1939.

<sup>137</sup> Dictatorship 42%, Don’t Know 36%, Civil Liberties 8%, Racism 3%, Corporatism 2%, Militarism 1%, see Hadley Cantril, *Public Opinion, 1935-1946* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), 208.



**Table 2:  
Relative Emphasis of Fascist Social Structures as Presented in Motion Pictures,  
Literature, and Newspapers**

Perceived Characteristic	Degree of Emphasis
Dictatorship/Anti-democratic	Primary
Suppression of Civil Liberties	Primary
Militarism	Primary
Anti-Semitism/Racism	Secondary
Anti- Union/Organized labour	Secondary

While fascism received favourable coverage from mainstream newspapers and journals through the mid-1930s, its popularity began to wane after Mussolini's 1935-36 invasion of Ethiopia and fell significantly after the *Kristallnacht* in 1938. A Roper poll conducted in 1937 showed that Americans preferred fascism to communism sixty-one to thirty-nine percent. However, by 1939, with the violence of the *Kristallnacht* common knowledge and the threat of war on the horizon, fascism's popularity among Americans dropped by seven percentage points.<sup>138</sup>

Fascism's admirers revered the system for some of the same reasons it was detested by its detractors. Where critics saw anti-democratic practices, fascism's advocates saw decisive government action that fostered efficiency; where some decried militarism, others applauded a restructuring of an inherently unfair post war order. Complaints about anti-unionism were met by the assertion that the breaking of organized labour was necessary to reduce unemployment. As far as racism, defenders of fascism had an easy time pointing out the hypocrisy of American complaints on this topic. Those who defended or supported European fascism tended to be of conservative inclination who praised it as a firewall against the spread of Bolshevism. Mussolini and Hitler were lauded for bringing order out of chaos, modernizing of their respective nations, and reshaping the relationship between capitalism and the state in a way that seemed to both mitigate the effects of the Great Depression and reduce class warfare.

Whether admiring or critical, authors, journalists, and moviemakers informed Americans' perceptions of the practices of fascism. During the interwar period, fascism

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<sup>138</sup> Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*, 333-336.

was understood primarily as a system characterized by dictatorship, the suppression of civil liberties, and militarism. Racism and anti-labour practices were also associated with fascism but with secondary emphasis. The analysis in this chapter expands the historiography by revealing how fascism was presented in literature, film, and newspapers and how that correlated with public opinion during the interwar years. These perceptions serve as critical context to understand what was implied by the those who alleged that the South was the region in America most sympathetic to fascist practices — a claim that is explored in detail in the next chapter.

### 3. Southern Fascism: Claims and Responses

From antebellum abolitionists to modern day coastal elites, the South, as a region, has long been a target of mockery for its perceived anti-modern and illiberal social structures and practices. While the historiography of southern criticism is well-established both in the writings of historians who argue for a distinctive South and those who posit it was more of a perceptual construct, there is a gap in the existing research regarding how this criticism evolved into significant and persistent claims by liberals that the South mirrored many aspects of European fascism during the interwar period. The development of this fascist charge — an assertion that the U.S. South displayed fascist political, economic and cultural tendencies — and how it was instrumentalized to pressure the South to reform, is explored in this chapter as well as the reaction of southerners to this claim.

The central questions addressed in this chapter are how criticism of the South metamorphosed under the lens of European fascism and how southerners responded. As discovered in the previous chapter, most Americans understood fascism as a set of practices characterized by a hostility to democracy, civil liberties, organized labour, and racial equality supported by militaristic regimes. The claim of southern fascism rested upon all of these characteristics with the exception of militarism — although the South has often been viewed as the most militaristic of American cultures and has hosted a disproportionate number of the country's military academies.<sup>1</sup> To address the wider topic being examined in this thesis — the South's connections and political response to fascism — it is first necessary to understand the logic put forth by those who linked southern and fascist practices, and that of those who refuted these claims. This debate fundamentally illuminates the worldview of interwar liberals and conservatives and their understanding of how the South's social structures fit within a wider transnational movement of illiberalism and white supremacy.

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<sup>1</sup> Wayne Cole, "America First and the South, 1940-1941," *Journal of Southern History* Vol. 22, No. 1 (Feb., 1956): 44.

The methodology of discourse analysis was employed to answer these questions.<sup>2</sup> The discourse of a number of groups ranging across the social hierarchy was analysed to understand the progression of the fascist charge against the South. The evolution of the discourse was traced from its origins among fringe low power actors to more organized but still marginalized groups, until it was eventually adopted by mainstream agents who ushered the allegation into the discourse. Tracking the genesis and lifecycle of the fascist allegation provides colour to motivations and meaning. Among the South's defenders, the focus is on the response by its elite, as the vein of primary sources is richest for this group, while the impact on ordinary southerners is chiefly considered using secondary sources. This methodology, in conjunction with the selected actors and primary sources, provides new insights in the field of southern criticism.

The South's critics used the lens of European fascism to alter the discourse of southern criticism to challenge the southern practices they found objectionable. The fascist charge was meant to bring pressure to bear on the South by yoking it to a larger un-American international movement. What was once a squabble over peculiar regional practices, now transformed into a global debate over fundamental principles. This was especially galling to southerners who viewed themselves as quintessentially American and the true racial and ideological decedents of the Founding Fathers.<sup>3</sup> The centuries long rhetorical battle between the North and South entered new phase with the emergence of European fascism.

The fascist charge amplified sectional tensions and alienated white southerners. As a defence mechanism, they responded by clinging tighter to regional narratives such as the 'Lost Cause,' and social structures such as sectionalism, religious fundamentalism,

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<sup>2</sup> Discourse analysis breaks from a "historiography orientated towards experience," with a systemic study of language. Peter Schöttler explained that there are two general approaches utilized in discourse analysis. First, is an examination of the themes of language in the context of cultural anthropology. The second pays "more attention to the peculiarities of the linguistic material and the unconscious ideological effects of discourse." This dissertation utilizes both approaches, but with an emphasis on the first, see Peter Schöttler, "Historians and Discourse Analysis," *History Workshop Journal*, Volume 27 Issue 1 (March 1989): 37–65.

<sup>3</sup> Americanism in the 1930s was understood to be a set of values that revered a democratic form of government, advocated for natural rights such as liberty and equality, and rejected authoritarian regimes which could endanger these rights, see Congressman Martin Dies, *The Evening News* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania), July 21, 1938, 19.

and white nationalism. Southerners, sensitized over time by persistent slights, rejected the characterization of fascism and reacted by ‘circling the wagons’ around those practices identified as being fascist-like. Thus, *near term*, the criticism of the South as fascist was counter-productive at effecting liberal reform and likely exacerbated the exercise of those practices found most abhorrent by the region’s detractors. However, *longer term*, these attacks effectively set the stage to thoroughly discredit illiberal southern social structures in the post-war period. The findings in this chapter, in addition to breaking new ground in chronicling the history of southern criticism, serve as historical context for the subsequent chapters that consider the connections between the interwar South and fascist Europe, and the South’s political response to fascism.

### 3.1. Defining ‘The South’

There is a rich historiography on the relationship of the South as part of the United States. The conventional approach among scholars has been to highlight the regional distinctness of the South. V.O. Key in his book *Southern Politics in the State and Nation* (1949), described the South as a racial state — its politics dominated by the need to maintain a system of white dominance over African Americans.<sup>4</sup> C. Vann Woodward in his book, *The Burden of Southern History* (1960), published prior to America’s deep involvement in the Vietnam War, posited that the experiences of its people resulting from the region’s unique history of loss and failure drove the South’s sense of distinctiveness.<sup>5</sup> George Tindall in *The Emergence of the New South: 1913-1945* (1967), ascribed the South’s unique character as a result of agrarian economics, fundamentalist religion, and race relations. More recently, Glenda Gilmore in *Defying Dixie* (2008), described ‘Dixie’ as a racial state — “another country with its own political and social institutions, upheld by a white supremacist regime.”<sup>6</sup> These authors, as well as others, including Fred Hobson, Caroline Janney, Jack Kirby, Angie Maxwell, and Nina

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<sup>4</sup> V. O. Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, [1949] 2006), 5.

<sup>5</sup> Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History*, 16-19.

<sup>6</sup> Glenda Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York: Norton, 2008), 1.

Silber, have all proposed ideological borders for the South centred on the histories and popular mythologies of enslavement, the Confederacy and Lost Cause, and the twin-pillars of white supremacy and anti-Black racism.<sup>7</sup>

Post-millennium there has arisen a counter movement of historians who have questioned the appropriateness of focusing on the South's distinctiveness. James Cobb posited the regional differentiation that existed in the 1930s was mostly gone by the 1980s.<sup>8</sup> Historian Laura Edwards went further by questioning the appropriateness of analysing the South's history in isolation from the rest of the country, arguing that southern issues were also national issues. For example, there was racism and segregation in the North as well as the South, and for a time in 1920s the Ku Klux Klan actually had more members in the North than the South. Organized labour was bitterly resisted by owners in the steel mills of Pennsylvania and the tire plants of Ohio, just like it was in the textile mills of North Carolina. As such, Edwards suggested that the South's distinctiveness is best recognized when considered in terms of its distance from national ideals.<sup>9</sup> Matthew Lassiter and Joseph Crespino echoed Edwards' arguments in their essay in *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism* (2010), emphasizing that the South should not be considered as an alien part of the nation, but rather just different by a matter of degree.<sup>10</sup> However, both Edwards and Lassiter vacillate in firmly shutting the door on the idea of a separate South during the interwar period. Edwards conceded that southern distinctiveness shaped the discourse as a "cultural construct," while Lassiter noted the

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<sup>7</sup> Fred Hobson, *The Serpent in Eden: H.L. Mencken and the South, 1920-1935* (Chapel Hill, University Of North Carolina Press, 1974); Caroline Janney, *Remembering the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Jack Kirby, *The Countercultural South* (University of Georgia Press, 1995); Angie Maxwell, *The Indicted South: Public Criticism, Southern Inferiority, and the Politics of Whiteness* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> James Cobb, "An Epitaph for the North", *The Journal of Southern History* Vol. 66 Issue 1 (2000): 9-11.

<sup>9</sup> Edwards, "Southern History as U.S. History," 534.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew Lassiter and Joseph Crespino, "Introduction: The End of Southern History" in *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 12.

convergence of northern and southern social structures accelerated only during the post war period.<sup>11</sup>

While acknowledging Edwards', Lassiter's, et al., concerns that the South must not be considered a region 'apart' from the larger country, the perspective of this thesis leans away from their exhortations. From the founding of the United States, the South as a region has manifested distinct economic, political, and social structures from the rest of the country. Even after the Confederacy was shattered and the South was brought back into the Union, the South presented itself as a region that was set apart by virtue of a cultural unity characterized by its collective temperament. Speaking in Birmingham, Alabama in 1938 Eleanor Roosevelt urged southerners to consider themselves "a part of a nation rather than a section."<sup>12</sup> W.J. Cash, in his book opined, "both [in] North and South – [there is] a profound conviction that the South is another land, sharply differentiated from the rest of the American nation, and exhibiting within itself a remarkable homogeneity." He continued, "It is different and it is solid — on these points nearly everyone is agreed."<sup>13</sup> Even foreigners could sense it. Commenting on the socioeconomic conditions of the region, two Russian journalists traveling through the South in 1935 noted, "there is something in the Southern states of its own, its own special something."<sup>14</sup> More recently, historians as Glenda Gilmore have described the South as a distinct racial state — "another country with its own political and social institutions, upheld by a white supremacist regime."<sup>15</sup>

While both contemporaries and historians have delineated ideological borders for the South, to facilitate a more precise analysis, it is necessary to identify the South in terms of its political geography. For the purposes of this dissertation, the South is considered to include the eleven states of the Confederacy plus Kentucky and

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<sup>11</sup> Edwards, "Southern History as U.S. History, 533; Lassiter, *The Silent Majority* (Princeton University Press, 2007), 4.

<sup>12</sup> *The Decatur Daily* (Decatur, Alabama), November 23, 1938, 2.

<sup>13</sup> W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Vintage Books, [1941] 1991), vlvii.

<sup>14</sup> Ilya Ilf and Evgeny Petrov, *Ilf & Petrov's American Road Trip* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, [1935] 2011), 120.

<sup>15</sup> Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York: Norton, 2008), 1.

Oklahoma.<sup>16</sup> This geographical delineation is well supported in the historiography. A number of historians including C. Vann Woodward and George Tindall in their respective entries in the *History of the South* series (volumes IX and X) defined the South as the eleven former Confederate states plus Kentucky and Oklahoma.<sup>17</sup> The Federal government also used this demarcation in its 1930s report that examined the “problem South.”<sup>18</sup> These thirteen states logically aggregate into a distinct group based on their *antebellum* practice of slavery and their *postbellum* one-party politics and Jim Crow legislation. Perhaps more importantly, the thirteen-state definition closely matches how the people in these states self-identify as southern.<sup>19</sup>

### 3.2. Tradition of Southern Criticism

For a time after Reconstruction, when national reconciliation was the priority, criticism of the South was muted. The nation united around a shared Gilded Age vision of commercial opportunity and Social Darwinian-informed white superiority, while the reputation of the South was rehabilitated by the Lost Cause and ‘moonlight and magnolias’ narratives. The Lost Cause myth, a narrative that the sons of the Confederacy had demonstrated manly fortitude by struggling against a more numerous and wealthier opponent for the principles of states’ rights and liberty, was promoted by both white southerners and some northerners as a basis for national reconciliation.<sup>20</sup> Black southerners, for their part, were largely abandoned by the North in this drive towards

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<sup>16</sup> The ex-Confederate states are: Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

<sup>17</sup> W.J. Cash geographically defined the South as being roughly delimited to the ex-Confederate states, but allows for some cross over to the border state of Kentucky, see Cash, *Mind of the South*, xlvi; Journalists Michie and Ryhlick also utilized the thirteen-state boundary, see Allan Michie and Frank Ryhlick, *Dixie Demagogues* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1939), 10; George Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South: 1913-1945* (Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1967), x.

<sup>18</sup> *The Report to the President on the Economic Conditions of the South* (1938), commissioned by President Roosevelt, demarcated the South as the eleven former Confederate states plus Kentucky and Oklahoma, see National Emergency Council, *Report to the President of the United States on the Economic Conditions in the South* (July 25, 1938), 4.

<sup>19</sup> “Data reveals what really defines the American South,” *Washington Post*, August 5, 2022; Walt Hickey, “Which States Are in the South?” *FiveThirtyEight*, April 30, 2014

<sup>20</sup> David Blight, *Race and Reunion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 258-266.



national reconciliation. The desire of white Americans to forget the misunderstanding between the states for the sake of national unity was facilitated by the adoption of the southern version of history. While this period of interregional reconciliation was overwhelmingly embraced by most Americans, there were some such as Frederick Douglass and Union army veterans who continued to agitate for a more liberal South.<sup>21</sup>

While many Northern white elites embraced this romanticized image to support reconciliation, they had their own purposes in promoting a fond remembrance of a South that exercised tight control over labour and minorities.<sup>22</sup> The southern way of life came to represent an escape from mass consumer society both in concept and refuge. Conceptually, non-southerners leveraged the idea of the South as a slow-paced anti-modern hinterland as a marketing ploy to sell movies, books, and goods ranging from Aunt Jemima syrup to ‘Amos ‘n’ Andy’ theatre.<sup>23</sup> The South was presented as a refuge from the Gilded Age hustle-and-bustle of the industrial boom as non-southerners were sold on vacationing in the pastoral South, the “land of Cavaliers and Cotton fields . . . Knights and Fair Ladies,” as a means to experience a simpler and more authentic time characterized by quirky and quaint beliefs.<sup>24</sup>

The warm period of sectional détente began to fade at the turn of the century when it became more common to discuss the America’s ‘southern problem.’<sup>25</sup> The initial trickle of criticism turned into a flood by the post-World War I period as a result of a number of factors. A revived Ku Klux Klan emerged out of Georgia in 1915 and thrived in the early 1920s by advocating a message of hate towards not only Black people, but also against Catholics, Jews, and ‘undesirable’ immigrants. In the tumultuous years after the World War I, the new Klan successfully marketed the idea to many whites of a racially and morally ‘pure’ America, with membership limited to native-born white

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<sup>21</sup> Caroline Janney, *Remembering the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 4-6, 267-271; David Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018), 635-638; Silber, *The Romance of Reunion*, 5.

<sup>22</sup> Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 6.

<sup>23</sup> Karen Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie* (University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 7.

<sup>24</sup> Silber, *The Romance of Reunion*, 69.

<sup>25</sup> Natalie Ring, *The Problem South* (University of Georgia, 2012), 32.

Protestants. Opposition to immigration of racially ‘suspect’ stock (people of colour, southern and eastern Europeans, and Jews) was a key recruiting point. The Klan’s ideas were firmly rooted in white supremacy; an ideology that had been a fundamental precept in the United States for much of its history and had facilitated a number of important national projects such as Manifest Destiny and the reintegration of the South back into the United States post-Reconstruction. The general thinking among the American public and lawmakers prior to the mid-twentieth century was that a racially homogenous white population was the best raw material for a thriving nation state, even if sometimes it was problematic to define what qualified as ‘white.’<sup>26</sup>

In addition to a general anti-immigrant sentiment, the Klan’s renaissance was assisted by the release in 1915 of the popular film, *The Birth of a Nation*, a motion picture directed by D. W. Griffith based on Thomas Dixon Jr.’s bestselling novel *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (1905). The movie feted the exploits of the original Klan that operated during Reconstruction and celebrated the brotherhood of white men.<sup>27</sup> The Klan’s revival and great success of the openly racist *Birth of a Nation* were catalysts for direct action resistance and launched a new era of opposition in the realm of popular culture against southern historical memory. The newly aroused discontent was signalled by the Niagara Movement, and was fostered by organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People that rejected the racial accommodationist policies of Booker T. Washington.<sup>28</sup>

The return home after World War I of southern Black veterans provided yet another source of social turmoil. The war had provided many Black veterans with the experience of something other than the heavy boot of the South’s racial state based on their observations of relatively progressive race relations in France. With the sense that they had done their part for America and democracy, some returning Black veterans

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<sup>26</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 205-227.

<sup>27</sup> Near the end of the film, one of the film’s intertitles reads, “The former enemies of the North and South are united again in common defense of their Aryan birthright.” D.W. Griffith, and Thomas Dixon, *Birth of a Nation* (Los Angeles, CA: Triangle Film Corp., 1915), YouTube.

<sup>28</sup> Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 397; Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*, 279.

demanded equal social and political rights based upon their service to country.<sup>29</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois famously called upon Black veterans to not simply “return from fighting” but to “return fighting.”<sup>30</sup> Across the country, the entreaties of Black veterans for civil rights were generally rejected and sometimes met with violence, contributing to an increased number of lynchings in the South and widespread racial violence across the United States, culminating in the Red Summer of 1919.

After the war, America emerged as new global superpower and an advocate of liberal-democracy abroad. Jim Crow laws and racial lynchings were increasingly a source of cognitive dissonance for white liberals that supported the principles outlined in Wilson’s Fourteen Points. Concurrently, an expanding national press facilitated a wider awareness of the second-class status of Black southerners. Savvy journalists soon found that exposés on the social injustices inherent within the southern way of life became a popular form of social commentary and a path towards professional recognition. One observer noted, “assaults on the barbarities of the benighted South became for that decade a high road to the Pulitzer Prize.”<sup>31</sup> Five Pulitzer Prizes were awarded between 1923 and 1929 for articles that investigated the Ku Klux Klan and lynching.<sup>32</sup>

A burgeoning Black press also played a role in fostering a greater awareness of the social injustices occurring in the South. In 1910, the NAACP began publishing *The Crisis*, a new magazine edited by W.E.B. Du Bois, to spotlight the reality of race prejudice, especially against Black people. It quickly became another source of scathing commentary on the South especially on the topic of lynching, voting rights, education, and Black poverty.<sup>33</sup> *The Crisis* was joined by a growing number of Black newspapers. The *Chicago Defender* founded in 1905 contributed to the Great Migration by

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<sup>29</sup> Even beyond the returning African American veterans, in the early 1920s black people were beginning to emerge from their fully subservient positions as they spread into new businesses and accelerated their gains in academia, see Frank Tannenbaum, *Darker Phases of the South* (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1924), 11.

<sup>30</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “Returning Soldiers,” *The Crisis*, May 1919, 14.

<sup>31</sup> Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South*, 215.

<sup>32</sup> George B. Tindall, “The Benighted South: Origins of a Modern Image,” *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 40, no. 2 (Spring, 1964): 289.

<sup>33</sup> W.E.B Du Bois editorial, *The Crisis*, November 1919, 10.

encouraging southern Blacks to leave the region, and in 1928 was instrumental in helping to elect Oscar DePriest as the congressman for Chicago; his election ended an almost thirty-year absence of African American representation in Congress.<sup>34</sup>

The net result of these forces was a wave of hostile criticism that washed over the South starting in the 1920s. As southern historian Donald Davidson described it, “The ink was hardly dry on the Treaty of Versailles, and the A.E.F. was not yet all back home...I do not think it would be an anachronism to say that a ‘cold Civil War’ began about that moment.”<sup>35</sup> The verbal détente promoted by most white elites in support of regional reconciliation evaporated during the 1920s and early 1930s, and the South was once again, as it had been before the Civil War, relentlessly disparaged as backward and hostile to liberal ideals. Common targets were the South’s religious fundamentalism, relative poverty, racial ordering, and labour relations.

During this period, H.L. Mencken, one of the most influential American writers and prose stylists of the first half of the twentieth century, was the South’s leading antagonist. In his 1920 essay, “Sahara of the Bozart,” Mencken mercilessly degraded and denigrated the South and its inhabitants. He described the South as filled with “shoddy cities” and “worn out farms” and being almost as sterile, artistically, intellectually, culturally, as the Sahara Desert.<sup>36</sup> He stated that southerners have “paralyzed cerebellums” and are ruled by “Baptist and Methodist barbarism.”<sup>37</sup> He further asserted that when the southern aristocracy was crushed by the Civil War, the region’s leadership passed on to “poor white trash.”<sup>38</sup> Mencken’s overarching view of the South is perhaps

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<sup>34</sup> H. Doc. 108-224, “The Negroes’ Temporary Farewell: Jim Crow and the Exclusion of African Americans from Congress, 1887–1929,” U.S. House of Representatives, October 15, 2008, 169-184.

<sup>35</sup> Fred Hobson, *The Serpent in Eden: H.L. Mencken and the South, 1920-1935* (Chapel Hill, University Of North Carolina Press, 1974), 13.

<sup>36</sup> In this vein he builds an even earlier tradition: the official New York state commissioners sent to the 1896 Atlanta World Fair, insulting described rural southerners as “a primitive people, who know little or nothing of the great world which lies beyond their ken of vision.” see, *New York at the Cotton States and international Exposition, Atlanta, Georgia* (Albany: Winkoop Hallenbeck Crawford Printers, 1896), 276.

<sup>37</sup> H. L. Mencken, “Sahara of the Bozart” in *Prejudices: Second Series* (New York, A.A. Knopf, 1920), 136-154.

<sup>38</sup> Mencken’s derisive epithet ‘white trash’, was first popularized in the North. In its earliest uses it was commonly employed to denigrate poor whites with some type of negative comparison to black people. For example, in 1822 the *Bangor Register* described how a local woman charged with being a witch made “de black niggers, and poor white trash tremble.” see, *Bangor Register* (Maine), August 1, 1822; A Vermont

best represented with his statement, “[the South is the] *bunghole* of the United States, a cesspool of Baptists, a miasma of Methodism, snake-charmers, phony real-estate operators, and syphilitic evangelists.”<sup>39</sup>

Other journalists joined Mencken in excoriating the South’s social structures and practices. The *Nation* published a dozen negative articles on the South — with a primary focus in lynching — between 1919 and 1923. It was soon joined by the *New Republic*, the *Literary Digest*, and *Century*.<sup>40</sup> Liberal southern journalists also became more active in their critique of southern race relations. Even so, the progressivism of liberal southern journalists had its limits. While they pushed for better race relations in the name of southern progress, they did not generally support the eliminating of segregation fearful that such a change would destabilize southern society and foment widespread violence.<sup>41</sup>

The topic of the ‘problem South’ was also addressed in book length. William Henry Skaggs in his book, *The Southern Oligarchy* (1924), catalogued a litany of complaints — illiteracy, lynching, and racism — against the South arguing the root of these social ills was the region’s lack of a true democratic system as a result of one-party rule.<sup>42</sup> A young Columbia University Professor, Austrian-American sociologist Frank Tannenbaum, was another writer who cast his critical eye upon the South with a series of essays published in his book, *Darker Phases of the South* (1924) in which he considered

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paper described a cartoon with a “Sambo” character worried the law would change to permit black men to marry white trash women, see *Burlington Weekly Free Press* (Burlington, Vermont), May 20, 1831, 1; A Pennsylvania daily described how a ‘randy’ young black man putting on airs was denied dancing permission with local ‘colored’ girls because their mothers did not want them to behave like white trash, see *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), December 3, 1836, 2; By the 1850s, the phrase gained widespread popularity within the South coincident with the growth of its poor white population, see Nancy Isenberg, *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America* (New York: Viking 2016), 149.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Charles Angoff, *H. L. Mencken, a Portrait from Memory* (New York: Yoseloff, 1956), 126.

<sup>40</sup> Hobson, *Serpent*, 82.

<sup>41</sup> John T Kneebone, *Southern Liberal Journalists and the Issue of Race, 1920-1944* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), xiii-xx.

<sup>42</sup> A claim he backed up by highlighting the South’s low voter participation rate of 28% in the 1912 presidential election that was less than half of that in the North, see William Henry Skaggs, *The Southern Oligarchy: an appeal in behalf of the silent masses of our country against the despotic rule of the few* (New York: The Devin-Adair Company, 1924), ix-x, 6.

southern racism, the Klan, its criminal justice system, and the curse of King Cotton.<sup>43</sup> Southern Gothic novelists also contributed to the negative stereotype of southern whites. Southern author Mary Flannery O'Connor whose stories often emphasized the South's regional peculiarities, commenting on her writing formula noted, "I have found that anything that comes out of the South is going to be called grotesque by the northern reader, unless it is grotesque, in which case it is going to be called realistic."<sup>44</sup> Erskine Caldwell was able to leverage this formula into a number of best sellers. In his novels *Tobacco Road* (1932) and *God's Little Acre* (1933), he painted a depressing picture of the South's rural pathology.<sup>45</sup> The stage for many of William Faulkner's novels was Yoknapatawpha County, an apocryphal 'little postage stamp' of territory in Mississippi; a background that allowed him to use southern stereotypes to embellish his stories. Southern racial conventions were integral to many of his novels and short stories.<sup>46</sup> The negative caricature of southerners was not the sole provenance of just fiction novelists. Jack Kirby in his book, *The Countercultural South* (1995), argued that many of the leading southern historians and commentators of the interwar period — including C. Vann Woodward, V.O. Key, George Tindall, W.J. Cash, and Vernon Wharton — all conveyed a problematic negativity in their description of poor white southerners.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Tannenbaum described the original Klan as a self-defense mechanism adopted by southerners to preserve some remnants of its antebellum civilization in the face of Northern oppression. He credited southern rural life with fomenting illiteracy, inbreeding, and intolerance, see Tannenbaum, *Darker Phases*, 8, 22-24.

<sup>44</sup> Flannery O'Connor, "Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction" in *Mystery and Manners* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1960), 40.

<sup>45</sup> Caldwell portrayed poor white southerners with a caricature level of depravity. For example, Jeeter, the protagonist in *Tobacco Road* is an illiterate impoverished cotton farmer living in Georgia during the depths of the Great Depression. He stubbornly refuses to leave his farm for work at the cotton mills. Jeeter is revealed as an adulterer and incestuous child abuser. As his family begins to starve, he marries his illegitimate twelve-year-old daughter to a man who contemplates tying her down and raping her — a man he later robs of a sack of turnips to prevent his own starvation. He gives his approval for his sixteen-year-old son to marry a thirty-nine-year-old female evangelical preacher with a facial deformity who was shown at one point enjoying a night of debauchery during which she was prostituted to multiple men, see Erskine Caldwell, *Tobacco Road* (New York: Random House, 1932).

<sup>46</sup> For instance, in the short story "Dry September" (1931), Faulkner presents the injustice of an innocent Black man being lynched. In *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) Faulkner painted his southern characters with the shame of miscegenation and the trope of incestuous relations.

<sup>47</sup> Jack Kirby, *The Countercultural South* (University of Georgia Press, 1995), 58-59; C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913: A History of the South* (Louisiana State Press, 1951), 124.

These writers helped cement the image of a benighted South in the minds of many northerners; as a result, by the end of the 1930s the South was perceived by many non-southerners as a region full of lynchings, poverty, hookworm, pellagra, Ku Klux Klanners, and poor whites.<sup>48</sup> Poor white southerners were stereotyped and derided with negative identifiers: ‘white trash,’ ‘rednecks,’ ‘hillbillies,’ and ‘hicks.’ Even the new ‘liberal’ Roosevelt administration was affected by and perpetuated this perception. Labour Secretary Frances Perkins outraged the South in 1933 when she stated, “a social revolution will take place if you put shoes on the people of the South.” The southern riposte was delivered by North Carolina Senator Joshua Bailey when he stated, “even the mules in the South wear shoes.”<sup>49</sup>

### **3.3. Allegations of Southern Fascism**

The manifestation of European fascism served as an ideological whetting stone for critics to sharpen their arguments against the South. Criticism of the South took on a new twist starting in the late 1920s and into 1930s when commentators began to assert that there were similarities between the social structures and practices of the region and those of the fascist countries, particularly Nazi Germany. The label served not only to demean the South but also to otherize it by implying that the southern practices to which some had long objected were not only morally reprehensible but were now un-American.

Before the advent of fascism, derogatory commentary about the South generally fell into one of two categories: that the region was anti-modern or illiberal. While the categories did not change, the nature of the commentary become more pejorative once the ‘problems’ of the South were considered under the lens of fascism. In other words, critics used the prism of fascism to escalate their rhetorical war against the South. For example, when Mencken and Skaggs pointed to the South’s backwardness, they did so in terms of the region’s relative poverty, sickly residents, and lack of industrialization. W.J. Cash and President Roosevelt, on the other hand, when making the fascist analogy, instead painted

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<sup>48</sup> Donald Davidson, *The Attack on Leviathan* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1938), 156.

<sup>49</sup> Congressional Record, 73 Cong., 1 Sess., (1933), 4155-56.

the South's anti-modernism as a state of mind — implying that southerners themselves were to blame for their plight, as opposed to external factors such as the North's economic treatment of the South.

The nature of the discourse on liberal issues such as democratic rule, suffrage, racial equality, and workers' rights, also changed with the introduction of the fascist comparison. The fascist allegation transformed the arguments, much to the dismay of white southerners, from disputes over what was once viewed as idiosyncratic regional practices to a worldwide fight over fundamental principles. Complaints were now framed within an international context: a global battle of the oppressors versus the oppressed — good against evil. By linking southern practices this broader phenomena, the South's detractors aimed to give their arguments greater resonance in the court of public opinion.

By no means was fascist identifier solely reserved for the South during the interwar period. Communists tended to label any person or movement that opposed them as fascist. In the United States, the socialist labour activists particularly used the term as an insult for anti-union forces across the country. Politicians such as President Roosevelt and his left-leaning Interior Secretary Harold Ickes used the word to describe concentrated economic power.<sup>50</sup> Right-wing commentators attempted to co-opt the term to describe the authoritarianism and big government approach of Roosevelt's New Deal. Nonetheless, the term had a unique relationship with the South. No other region of the country was similarly disparaged with the fascist identifier during the interwar period.

How the South was singled-out to become so especially identified is the topic of the following discussion. It was a process that occurred over time and involved a number of players each with their own motivation. Communist linked labour organizers were the first to assert a connection in the late 1920s by emphasizing parallels between the suppression of organized labour in Fascist Italy and the South. Once the Nazis captured

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<sup>50</sup> In a 1935 speech in Altoona, Pennsylvania Ickes referring to big business and the wealthy stated, "a sinister movement [exists] to superimpose on our free American institutions a hateful system of fascism." The movement was comprised of "those who have grown tremendously wealthy not only through the exploitation of natural resources, but of men, women, and children in America," see Michael Roberto, *The Coming of the American Behemoth: The Origins of Fascism in the United States, 1920-1940* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2018), 342; FDR Press Conference #452, April 19, 1938, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.



the German state and began to implement Aryan race policy, Black writers began to vociferously underscore similarities related to racial oppression. Next came liberal white writers and politicians who cavilled about a gamut of issues ranging from segregation to southern sectionalism.

The original progenitors of the fascist allegation were communist linked labour organizers. Inspired by Trotsky's maxim that the essential component or 'gist' of fascism was the drive to destroy workers' organizations, they labelled as fascist anyone who steadfastly resisted the organized labour movement.<sup>51</sup> The American Federation of Labour (AFL) was the largest labour union in the U.S. during the 1920s and early 1930s and largely resisted communist influence within its ranks.<sup>52</sup> The AFL's chief competitor before World War I was the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), a union that supported both socialism and racial integration.<sup>53</sup> Government suppression combined with internal squabbles greatly diminished the IWW's influence by the mid-1920s leaving the AFL as the predominate national labour organization in America. The IWW was eventually replaced by The Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in the mid-1930s. The CIO had strong connections to the American Communist Party and focused on organizing lower skilled workers into racially integrated unions.<sup>54</sup> It was during this time that leaders at the highest level of the Communist Party established the discursive

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<sup>51</sup> "When a state turns fascist, it does not mean only that the forms and methods of government are changed in accordance the patterns set by Mussolini -- the changes in this sphere ultimately play a minor role -- but it means first of all for the most part that the workers' organizations are annihilated; that the proletariat is reduced to an amorphous state; and that a system of administration is created which penetrates deeply into the masses and which serves to frustrate the independent crystallization of the proletariat. Therein precisely is the gist of fascism..." Leon Trotsky, *What Next? Vital Question for the German Proletariat* (New York: Pioneer, 1932), Chapter 1.

<sup>52</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1930, Volume 72 Part 4:4526

<sup>53</sup> During World War I, the U.S. government suppressed the IWW since it organized work stoppages; later its leader Eugene Debs was jailed as a subversive under the Sedition Act in 1918. The IWW suffered further setbacks in the post war period, as the Bolshevik Revolution triggered a 'red scare' that resulted in the arrest and prosecution of many of its socialist members. The 'red scare' was not purely a hysterical phantasm as Bolshevik sympathizers organized the American Communist Party in 1919, and were linked to violence such as the firebombing of Attorney General Mitchell Palmer's Washington D.C. home in June 1919, and placement of a bomb on Wall Street killing thirty-eight people and wounding hundreds in 1920.

<sup>54</sup> Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 185-186; Harvey Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 223-224; "Witnesses Link Leaders of C.I.O. to Communism," *Chicago Tribune*, October 21, 1938, 1, 18.

frame that anti-unionism in general, and the American South in particular, should be identified as fascist.

Communist labour influence was first felt in the southern labour movement in Gastonia, North Carolina, via the new communist-funded National Textile Workers Union (NTWU) that attempted to organize workers in North Carolina in 1928.<sup>55</sup> Southern elites reacted viscerally to arrival of communists in their region and responded heavily-handedly with a combination of state sanctioned and extra-judicial violence. In the wake of the Gastonia and other textile strikes, for the first time, southern labour practices were labelled as fascist. In 1929, the *Labour Defender*, a communist funded publication associated with the NTWU, published a picture of delegates protesting the treatment of textile workers holding signs stating, “Down with the fascist terrorism and anti-labour legislation.”<sup>56</sup>

The court case of labour organizer Angelo Herndon catalysed additional claims of southern fascism. Angelo Herndon was an African American Communist who was arrested in Atlanta in 1932 for distributing union literature and organizing the unemployed. Herndon was charged under a slave era law of attempting to incite a rebellion.<sup>57</sup> The local Atlanta prosecutor, John Hudson, sought the death penalty as punishment.<sup>58</sup> Herndon referred to his persecutors in 1933 as “fascist dogs,” and drew a comparison between his treatment and political prisoners in Nazi Germany.<sup>59</sup> In 1935, the Negro Commission of the Soviet Comintern connected the dots between global fascism and the South, declaring, “the war makers [Italians] are those who raped Africa...they are

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<sup>55</sup> Tindall, *The Emergence of the South*, 344.

<sup>56</sup> J. Louis Engdahl, “Six Months in the South,” *Labor Defender*, January 1930, 5.

<sup>57</sup> Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 115, 161.

<sup>58</sup> The insurrection law was based on a 1833 statute passed by the Georgia legislature. It declared it a capital offense either to incite or to attempt to incite a revolt among slaves or to circulate written materials for the purposes of inspiring resistance or revolt by slaves or free persons ‘of color,’ see Michal Belknap, *American Political Trials* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood, 1994), 162.

<sup>59</sup> Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 173; “Georgia Officials Ape Hitler Terror,” *Labor Defender*, July 1934, 6.

the lynchers of black men and the despoilers of black women...they [Nazis and southerners] have jailed Thaelmann and...Herndon.”<sup>60</sup>

The communist charge of southern fascism catalysed a shift in the discourse. This was new language. Prior to the early 1930s, it was more typical for labour activists to identify labour suppression as ‘imperialistic’ instead of fascist.<sup>61</sup> The identification of the South as fascist for its labour practices snowballed throughout the 1930s. In 1935, a journalist interviewing Georgia Governor Eugene Talmadge about the Herndon case, labelled Talmadge as, “the South’s leading contender for the Hitler role,” and concluded, “If Herndon goes to the chain gang you have one step further toward outright Fascism.”<sup>62</sup> In 1936, Sherwood Eddy, a pro-communist Protestant minister who campaigned for workers’ rights, described the working conditions for tenant farmers in the South as slave-like, feudal, and fascist.<sup>63</sup> In 1938, Marion Cuthbert, the national secretary of the YWCA, castigated the South for its labour practices, stating, “A Fascist state requires a divided mass of workers – divided so that they cannot resist a system that exploits them mercilessly.”<sup>64</sup>

African American journalists were the next group to adopt this identification of the South when they interpreted southern racism through the lens of European fascism. Black writers aimed to use the fascist charge to discredit southern practices and to generate cognitive dissonance among Americans who despised the illiberalism of the fascist states but were untroubled by southern practices. While their complaints were largely ineffectual at first, they became increasingly potent over the course of the 1930s as more Americans began to perceive European fascism as distinctly un-American. Over time, the parallels drawn to the racial practices of fascist Europe became the most

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<sup>60</sup> Ernest Thaelmann was the head of the German Communist Party (KPD) who the Nazis imprisoned and allegedly tortured before executing him, see Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 184.

<sup>61</sup> “The World Looks at Scottsboro,” *Labor Defender*, February 1932, 23.

<sup>62</sup> Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 187.

<sup>63</sup> *The Negro Star*, founded in 1920, was originally based in Greenwood, Mississippi but moved to Kansas City, Kansas in 1919 as a result of the hostility of local white Mississippians; Sherwood Eddy, “Sherwood Eddy Makes a Plea. Amazing Conditions in the South,” *Negro Star*, July 31, 1936, 1.

<sup>64</sup> “Miss Cuthbert Counsels Union of All-Workers.” *Black Worker* (New York, New York), August 1, 1936, 8.

damaging of the fascist related claims against the South, and the most effective argument that the region operated outside of mainstream American values.

One of the earliest examples of Black papers linking the practices of the South and the fascists was illustrated in a cartoon “Another Klansman” in *The Philadelphia Tribune* in 1933.

Figure 1: “Another Klansman” by Chase



The cartoon was followed by an editorial that claimed Germany was doing to its Jewish people what the South did to its Black population with the “lynching of the Negro, disenfranchisement, and economic oppression.”<sup>65</sup> A year later, the *Negro Star* asserted a similar analogy with a cartoon that depicted Hitler as Simon Legree, the antagonist in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, whipping enslaved African Americans.<sup>66</sup> Noting parallels between the European fascists and the Ku Klux Klan was common in the Black press. The

<sup>65</sup> “Another Klansman,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, April 6, 1933, 3, 16.

<sup>66</sup> “Hitler, the Modern Simon Legree,” *Negro Star*, May 18, 1934, 1.

*Wyandotte Echo* published an article titled, "Hitler Smells of Ku Klux Klanism."<sup>67</sup> The *Plaindealer* editorialized, "And while it is true that the case of the Jews in Europe is not exactly like that of the Negroes of America yet there is a close kin to their treatment by Fascist Germany and the Ku Klux Klan spirit against Negroes."<sup>68</sup> These allegations by Black journalists linking the Klan and fascism drew upon observations first made in the early 1920s by white journalists regarding the extra-judicial violence used by both the Klan and Mussolini's Fascists.<sup>69</sup>

These comparisons became increasingly prevalent as the decade progressed. The communist journal *Negro Worker*, published in Germany, wrote in the spring of 1933, "today Negroes like Jews are the daily victims of fascist terrorism."<sup>70</sup> James Weldon Johnson, a Harlem writer and a leader in the NAACP wrote in his book, *Negro Americans, What Now* (1934), "Most of us, it is true, have for long years lived in the Fascist South."<sup>71</sup> Later in 1938 he reiterated this idea, writing that black southerners had "lived under a certain and very definite form of Fascism for the past sixty years."<sup>72</sup> An article in *The Crisis* compared Italy's colonial management of its Somali territories to an "African Mississippi."<sup>73</sup> The *Negro Voice* in 1935 compared the plight of Black southerners with that of German Jews, writing "fascism is nothing new for the Negro...who can doubt, that, what the Jew is to German Fascism, the Negro will be to the American brand."<sup>74</sup> Ben Johnson, a Black track star who competed at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, agreed, "The Negro in the South is discriminated against as much as the Jews

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<sup>67</sup> "Hitler Smells of Ku Klux Klanism." *Wyandotte Echo*, April 14, 1933, 1.

<sup>68</sup> "Best Editorial of the Week." *Plaindealer*, November 17, 1939, 7.

<sup>69</sup> Gian Migone, *The United States and Fascist Italy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 37.

<sup>70</sup> Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 168.

<sup>71</sup> James Weldon Johnson, *Negro Americans, What Now?* (New York: Viking Press, 1934), 11.

<sup>72</sup> Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 199.

<sup>73</sup> Howard Preece, "Fascism and the Negro," *The Crisis*, December 1934, 366.

<sup>74</sup> "Fascism and the Race Question," *Negro Voice*, October 1, 1935, 5.

in Germany.”<sup>75</sup> A 1936 Afro-American editorial observed, “the South and Nazi Germany are mental brothers.”<sup>76</sup>

The Nazis welcomed the perceived similarities between their racial state and that of the South, and weaponized this sentiment to push back against American criticism of National Socialism. Julius Streicher in *Das Schwarze Korps* declared, “the treatment of the Negroes in America [is] far worse than that accorded Jews by the Nazis and America’s criticism should be turned in that direction rather than toward Germany.”<sup>77</sup> Hitler encouraged Americans to “tend to your own lynchings of Negroes.”<sup>78</sup> *Der Sturmer* published a cartoon in 1935 of a black man hanging from a tree captioned, “People’s Justice in the United States.”<sup>79</sup> In 1938, *Das Schwarze Korps* printed a cartoon showing an angry ‘hook-nosed’ American Jew in the foreground complaining against German “barbarism” while two African Americans are lynched and executed in the background.<sup>80</sup> *Das Schwarze Korps* frequently used illustrations to lampoon Americans’ racial double standard and hypocrisy as illustrated in the two cartoons below.

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<sup>75</sup> Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 190.

<sup>76</sup> “The Nazis and Dixie,” *Afro-American*, February 22, 1936, 4.

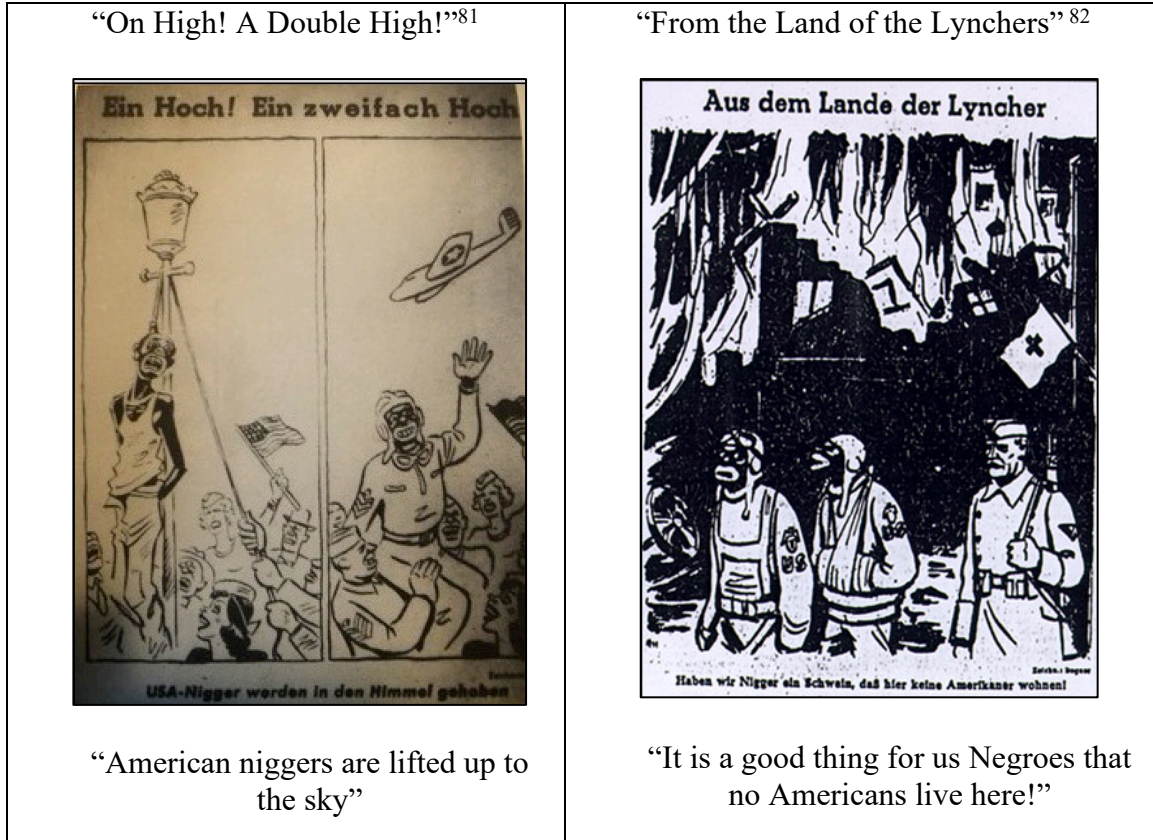
<sup>77</sup> Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 170, 194.

<sup>78</sup> “The Nazis Poke Fun at America,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 22, 1935.

<sup>79</sup> Randall Bytwerk, *Julius Streicher: Nazi Editor of the Notorious Anti-Semitic Newspaper Der Sturmer* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2001), 148.

<sup>80</sup> “The Last Scream,” *Das Schwarze Korps*, November 24, 1938.

**Figures 2 and 3: Nazi Cartoons on Discrimination in U.S.**



While African Americans were outspoken critics of how the Nazi regime treated Jews and highlighted parallels to the South, there is a debate in the historiography as to the degree which this attention reflected empathy or self-interest. African Americans led a number anti-Semitic race riots in the 1920s, and racial relations between the two groups remained strained throughout the 1930s. Walter White, head of the NAACP, received a number of letters from African Americans that celebrated Jewish persecution and argued that it was karmatic justice for their discrimination against Black people in America. The Chicago based African American publication *Dynamite* printed, “What America needs is a Hitler and what the Chicago Black Belt needs is a purge of the exploiting Jew.”<sup>83</sup> The

<sup>81</sup> *Das Schwarze Korps*, July 7, 1943, 2; William Combs, *The Voice of the SS: A History of the SS Journal 'Das Schwarze Korps'* (New York: Peter Lang, 1986), 173.

<sup>82</sup> “From the Land of the Lynchers,” *Das Schwarze Korps*, 1943, retrieved from the Propaganda Archive, Calvin College, [<https://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/sk.htm>]

<sup>83</sup> Zucker, “*Black Americans' Reaction*, 183-184.

editors of the African American *New York Age* opined, “If the Jewish merchants in Germany treated German workers as Blumstein’s treat the people of Harlem, then Hitler is right.” Tensions between African Americans and Jews in New York gave rise to Black nationalists such as Sufi Abdul Hamid, sometimes called the ‘Black Hitler’, who led boycotts against Jewish businesses in the 1930s.<sup>84</sup> This type of rhetoric, however, was on the margins, and the overwhelming reaction from the African American community was to condemn the Nazis.

Historian Bat-Ami Zucker in her article, “Black Americans’ Reaction to the Persecution of European Jews” posited that the Black press’ criticism of Nazi Germany “was motivated mainly by the blacks’ own interests.” Zucker claimed that Black people used Jewish suffering to highlight their own racial plight in America and as an excuse to point a finger of condemnation at U.S. federal and state authorities.<sup>85</sup> Glenda Gilmore largely rejects Zucker’s ‘self-interest’ thesis about African American’s motives. While she concedes that local Jewish Communists at times adopted an “open antagonistic attitude towards Negroes,” and there was African American anti-Semitism, she concluded that their actions generally represented an honest empathetic response as fellow victims of state-sponsored repression.<sup>86</sup>

In either case, most Black journalists perceived that international fascism posed a direct threat to racialized minorities including Black people. They were concerned about the example Hitler was setting for other leaders regarding how to deal with ‘troublesome’ minorities. Commenting on Hitler’s quest to regain Germany’s lost African colonies, *The Negro Star* noted, “Under Fascist rule the struggle of Native people, and Negroes everywhere for national emancipation would receive a tremendous setback and the colonial slave system would be further entrenched.”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Clive Webb, “The Nazi Persecution of Jews and the African American Freedom Struggle,” *Patterns of Prejudice*, 53 (4) (2019): 337-362.

<sup>85</sup> Bat-Ami Zucker, “Black Americans’ Reaction to the Persecution of European Jews,” in Annual Vol. 3 Simon Wiesenthal Center (Houston: Rossel Books, 1986), 179.

<sup>86</sup> Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 99, 138.

<sup>87</sup> “Negro Workers Send out Appeal from Paris to Check Menace of Hitlerism in Africa,” *The Negro Star*, February 19, 1937, 1.



Whether or not African Americans were empathetic or pragmatic in their condemnation of fascism, writing about the perceived similarities between the South and European fascists gave Black journalists another platform to voice their complaints against Jim Crow. Their grievance was not so much that white southerners held ideas of racial superiority, since such ideas were widespread throughout the country and even thought to be scientifically established through the science of eugenics, but rather how the South manifested this ideology through legislative segregation (Jim Crow laws) and vigilante lynching. In other words, the South was not singled out so much for its racism, but rather for its practices of racism.

While labour organizers and Black journalists were early adopters of the fascist allegation, they were not sufficiently influential in the social hierarchy to make this identification stick in the public discourse. This only occurred once mainstream white journalists and politicians also adopted the identification. Will Rogers, was one of earliest famous personalities to publicly comment on the similarity between the European fascism and the South saying in 1933, “papers all state Hitler is trying to copy Mussolini. Looks to me it’s the Ku Klux that he is copying.”<sup>88</sup> Sinclair Lewis in his book, *It Can’t Happen Here* (1935), also made a few pointed references about the South. In one instance, Stalin asks advice from Senator Theodore Bilbo from Mississippi about how to implement the “*Gleichschaltung* of Mississippi.”<sup>89</sup> *Gleichschaltung* was the term for the coordination of society along Nazi lines. Lewis paints his fictional American fascist dictator, Buzz Windrip, as an adopted southerner by virtue of his Southern Baptist college education and his selection of a plantation-owning southerner as his Vice President.

Another early work yoking together the South with European fascism was by journalist Virginius Dabney. Dabney, who toured Germany in 1934 and left disgusted with what he observed, had first-hand knowledge of National Socialism.<sup>90</sup> In his essay,

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<sup>88</sup> Wyn Wade, *The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 266.

<sup>89</sup> Sinclair Lewis, *It Can’t Happen Here* (New York: Signet Classics, [1935] 2014), 132.

<sup>90</sup> Kneebone, *Southern Liberal Journalists and the Issue of Race*, 177.

“If the South Had Won the War” (1936) Dabney envisioned an alternate history where the South had won the Civil War. In this scenario, he predicted that the South would have been susceptible to fascism and might possibly have been ruled by a Huey ‘Kingfish’ Long like fascist dictator. Dabney wrote, “we denizens of Dixie might have found ourselves slapped in the face by his storm-troopers for failure to salute the piscatorial insignia on ceremonial occasions, and belaboured with *Gummiknüppel* [rubber truncheons], à la Nazi, for failure to leap at the piscatorial command.” He predicted that under the leadership of “Fuhrer Long” the Confederacy would have been characterized by nationalism, militarism, and the indoctrination its children with a version of the Hitler Youth.<sup>91</sup> Southern journalist Hodding Carter also noted the parallels between Huey Long and Adolf Hitler. Writing deep in Long’s territory of New Orleans, Hodding observed, “today seems to be the age of the rabble-rousing dictator, who preys upon the prejudices, the hatreds the cupidity of men.”<sup>92</sup>

A number of liberal southern journalists elucidated the fascist charge against the South at greater length in book form. Clarence Cason was a professor of journalism at the University of Alabama when he published a series of mildly critical essays on the South in his book, *90 Degrees in the Shade* (1935). He levelled the fascist charge in an essay, “Fascism: Southern Style.” Jonathan Daniels, in his popular travelogue and social commentary on the South, *A Southerner Discovers the South* (1938), likened the Ku Klux Klan to the Brown Shirts of Germany and the Black Shirts of Italy.<sup>93</sup> In an article later that year he widened this condemnation to include ordinary southerners, stating, “all of us saw, free this time of any circus trappings of klan, a cold-blooded and determined fascism in the South,” and “I fear — I hope foolishly...something strange, too native to be [called] fascism, is breeding in the sun.” Daniels detailed his case for the fascist charge: the South crushed organized labour, was undemocratic, lynched blacks, and was led by demagogues.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Virginius Dabney, “If the South Had Won the War,” *American Mercury* (October 1936): 202 - 205.

<sup>92</sup> Hodding Carter, *Hammond Daily Courier*, August 3, 1934, 2.

<sup>93</sup> Jonathan Daniels, *A Southerner Discovers the South* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938), 341.

<sup>94</sup> Jonathan Daniels, “Democracy is Bread,” *The Virginia Quarterly Review* Vol.14 (1938): 481-490.

Perhaps the most important work by a white southerner that linked the South to fascism was W.J. Cash's, *The Mind of The South* (1940).<sup>95</sup> *Mind of the South* was meant as an introspective analysis of the South's moral temperament and culture, and to expose the dangers of southern authoritarianism. Written as a moral lesson for his fellow southerners, Cash painted a dark picture of southern culture, reproving it for both its anti-Modernism and illiberalism. Cash used the lens of European fascism to sharpen the focus of his arguments against southern authoritarianism, claiming that the South and Nazi Germany shared similar ideology and social structures. Cash's first explicit mention of a connection between the fascism and southern practices in fact, was made prior to finishing *The Mind of the South*. In a 1936 article he remarked upon the similarities between the Ku Klux Klan and the Nazis. He wrote, "some of our American Ku Kluxers... seem so hotly bent on taking us into Fascism, willy-nilly."<sup>96</sup> Later, he reversed the analogy and compared the Nazis to the Klan and identified a parallel between "the hate and brutality" of German anti-Semitism and the oppression of black people in the South.<sup>97</sup>

In *The Mind of the South*, he made the comparison even more explicit. Cash introduced the concept of the 'Savage Ideal' to represent the dark underbelly of southern society. It was the practices embedded within the southern 'Savage Ideal' that comprised the thrust of Cash's charge of southern fascism: brutal, violent racism; xenophobia; ignorance and anti-intellectualism; self-righteousness and blind defensiveness.<sup>98</sup> He wrote that the 'Savage Ideal' was established in the South, "as it had not been established

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<sup>95</sup> Cash was a native South Carolinian who graduated from Wake Forest University. He was a self-declared liberal who was influenced and inspired by H.L. Mencken. Cash adopted a similar vocabulary and mocking tone as Mencken when writing about the South. Mencken, as editor of the *American Mercury*, published the Cash's essay, "Mind of the South" in 1929 — what would serve as the foundation for Cash's same titled book over a decade later. Mencken encouraged Cash and enthusiastically purchased and published his work as well as recommended him to his future publishers of his book at Knopf. While working as a journalist, Cash finally completed his book after a decade of writing over the course of the 1930s, see Hobson, *Serpent*, 111-120; Brinkmeyer, *Fourth Ghost*, 71-73.

<sup>96</sup> Cash, "Papa Franz Boas: He's A Testy and Aged Teuton, Who Proves That Racial Blood Streams Are as Fickle as The Waters, And as Lively," *The Charlotte News*, July 12, 1936.

<sup>97</sup> Cash, "Germany Real Loser in Pogroms," *The Charlotte News*, November 19, 1939.

<sup>98</sup> Angie Maxwell, *The Indicted South: Public Criticism, Southern Inferiority, and the Politics of Whiteness* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 11.

in any Western people since the decay of medieval feudalism, and almost as truly as it is established today in Fascist Italy, in Nazi Germany, in Soviet Russia — and so paralyzed southern culture at the root.”<sup>99</sup> After *Mind of the South* was published, Cash experienced anxiety about what he had done: castigating the South and comparing to fascist Europe. He committed suicide five months after the book was published apparently under the belief that he was being hunted by Nazi agents who took his book to be manifesto against Naziism and southern authoritarianism. This was the second suicide, after Cason’s, of a prominent southern writer who was tormented by the consequences of making a connection between the South and fascist Europe.<sup>100</sup>

While some white journalists castigated their home region with the fascist charge, they did not, unlike labour activists and Black journalists, attempt to use the fascist identification as a lever to demand the end of segregation. While critical of some of the illiberal practices in the South, liberal southern journalists were proud of the gradual progress being made especially when compared to the quickly deteriorating treatment of minorities in Europe. Satisfied with the trajectory of race relations in the South as demonstrated through the Inter-Regional Councils and the declining frequency of lynchings, they did not support the near-term dismantling of Jim Crow.<sup>101</sup> While these liberal writers were quick to allege southern fascism when attacking the Klan and lynching, in other areas they showed their conservative southern roots. For example, Ethridge praised Hitler for bringing order and stability to Germany and cleaning out the homosexuals from Berlin. Dabney credited Hitler with restoring German pride and for the implementation of eugenic-based forced sterilization programs.<sup>102</sup> Southern journalists were not social radicals; they were reformers within the framework of their

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<sup>99</sup> Cash, *The Mind of the South*, 134.

<sup>100</sup> There was a string of suicides among southerners who breached the taboo of regional criticism. Hinton Helper argued that slavery was bad for white people in his book, *The Impending Crisis of the South: How to Meet It* (1857). It was banned in the South and he later committed suicide. Clarence Cason, author of *90 Degrees in the Shade* (1935), a series of essays critical about southern culture, also committed suicide shortly after his book was published. He was apparently fearful about the potential recriminations from his fellow faulty members and southerners as a result of his criticisms of the South, see Brinkmeyer, *The Fourth Ghost*, 94.

<sup>101</sup> Kneebone, *Southern Liberal Journalists and the Issue of Race*, 181.

<sup>102</sup> Grill, “The American South and Nazi Racism,” 22-23.

society. Nonetheless, by propagating the fascist allegation originally formulated by fringe groups, southern white journalists and authors were instrumental in embedding the fascist identification within the discourse.

A number of European intellectuals also linked the South to fascism. Historian James Whitman noted that it was common for Europeans during the interwar years to link the South to fascist Europe.<sup>103</sup> As early as 1931, the British journal *The Economist* compared the governing style of the Nazis to that of southern governors.<sup>104</sup> Dutch ethnographer, Bertram Schrieke, stated that the South “with its violence, intimidation, open bribery, stuffing ballot boxes...all serving to eliminate negro voters...reminds one strongly of the rise of the Nazis in Germany,” while Swedish sociologist Gunnar Myrdal wrote, “the South is sometimes referred to as fascist.”<sup>105</sup> Heinrich Krieger, a German and later prominent Nazi attorney who studied abroad at the of Arkansas School of Law, compared the one-party rule of in the South to that of the Nazis in Germany.<sup>106</sup> At least one European observer, German writer A.E. Johann, reached the opposite conclusion. After spending a few weeks in the South living among sharecroppers, Johann wrote that it reminded him more of Bolshevism than fascism.<sup>107</sup>

Northern liberal politicians were yet another stakeholder group that identified certain southern practices as fascist, and with their adoption, the fascist allegation became firmly embedded in the public discourse. In 1938, Republican New York Senator Wagner asserted that southern lynching was emblematic of fascism. He stated, “the threat of local and occasional mob action, tolerated or connived in by local officers, must be stamped out before its contagion spreads. To ignore warning is to acquiesce to incipient fascism.”<sup>108</sup> Later that year in stumping for anti-lynching legislation he declared, “with

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<sup>103</sup> James Whitman, *Hitler's American Model* (Princeton University Press, 2017), 69.

<sup>104</sup> "The 'Nazis' in Trouble." *The Economist*, April 11, 1931: 777.

<sup>105</sup> Bertram Schrieke, *Alien Americans: A Study of Race Relations* (New York: Viking, 1936), 125; Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1944), 458.

<sup>106</sup> James Whitman, *Hitler's American Model* (Princeton University Press, 2017), 69.

<sup>107</sup> A.E. Johann, *Das Land ohne Herz: Eine Reise ins unbekannte Amerika* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag, 1942), 24 – 27.

<sup>108</sup> "Wagner Vows to Press for Lynching Ban" *Capitol Plaindealer*, July 15, 1938, 1.

all means at our command, we must meet the challenge of the Fascist tendencies manifested in the action of lynching mobs.”<sup>109</sup> That same year, Illinois State Senator T.V. Smith speaking at the annual NAACP convention in the wake of the failure of the anti-lynching bill in Congress, commented, “[the] Negro understands fascism because even American democracy is fascism to colored men.”<sup>110</sup>

The most prominent politician to assert a parallel between the South and European fascism was President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. In a March 23, 1938 speech given in Georgia, FDR stated, “Things will not come to us in the South if we oppose progress—if we believe in our hearts that the feudal system is still the best system. When you come down to it, there is little difference between the feudal system and the Fascist system. If you believe in the one, you lean to the other.”<sup>111</sup> At the time of his speech, FDR was greatly frustrated with the resistance of a group of conservative southern Democrat senators to some of his proposed New Deal initiatives and attempted to ‘purge’ them from Congress by directly intervening in the 1938 Democratic primaries. The vast majority of southerners — eighty-one percent according to a Gallup poll — resented FDR’s attempt to dictate local politics.<sup>112</sup> FDR retreated from the strategy of targeting conservative Democrats after his attempted purge proved to be a disastrous experiment; and as the international situation darkened, the very conservatives he tried to eliminate became his strongest allies in overriding the isolationists in his own party.

Note that FDR condemned the South for its anti-modernism and not for its lack of liberalism. It is yet another example of FDR giving the South a pass on its illiberal racial, labour, and political practices for political purposes. Two decades later his wife, Eleanor, would echo FDR’s concerns about the South, but in terms of liberal principles. She wrote, “I cannot help having a deep interest in the welfare of the state of Georgia, and of the South as a whole. Still, I never go into that part of the country and come away without

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<sup>109</sup> "Wagner Demands That U. S Attorney General Probe Recent Lynching," *Plaindealer*, July 22, 1938, 2.

<sup>110</sup> "Speakers Hit Prejudice at Tolerance Meeting." *Negro Star*, July 8, 1938, 2.

<sup>111</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, Address at Gainesville, Georgia, March 23, 1938. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/209547>

<sup>112</sup> George Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971* (New York: Random House, 1972), 70, 115, 117.

a certain sense of sadness. One can enjoy oneself superficially, but one must shut one's eyes.”<sup>113</sup>

The examples cited above represent just a small sampling of the widespread and persistent allegations made during the interwar years by labour activists, Black writers, liberal white authors and politicians identifying the South as ‘fascist.’ Communist-linked labour activists were among the first to identify the South in this manner by drawing parallels to the violent approach southern authorities took towards organized labour to that of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. The allegation from this fringe group was repeated by the Black press, and then eventually made its way into the mainstream discourse when picked up by liberal white journalists and politicians. While late to the game, liberal white writers and politicians effectively operationalized the idea and effected a turn in the public discourse. Now embedded in the discourse, the fascist allegation became a powerful rhetorical tool to bring pressure upon the South to change the practices that its critics found objectionable. While southerners could shrug off comments from socialists and Black activists, they found it harder to ignore the President of the United States and the influential voices of the white liberal intelligentsia.

### **3.4. The Southern Reaction**

With few exceptions, white southerners, from intellectuals to uneducated laborers, squarely rejected the allegation that their regional practices somehow compared to those of the European fascists. Southerners considered themselves the best Americans and their region as one of the last bastions of traditional western values. They interpreted the fascist allegation as yet another baseless attack by liberals and outsider agitators on their way of life and another manifestation of the longstanding disparagement of their region.

White southerners had a long history of being prickly about outside criticism. In 1836, southern congressmen pushed through a ‘Gag Rule’ that automatically tabled all petitions, memorials, or resolutions regarding slavery so that they would no longer have

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<sup>113</sup> Eleanor Roosevelt, “My Day”, *New York Times*, Feb. 4, 1950. Retrieved from Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project, Columbia University.

to suffer insults from ‘uncouth Yankees’ on the floor of the House regarding their peculiar institution. Representing the most violent instance in the history of Congress, Representative Preston Brooks in 1856 mercilessly beat Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner on the floor the U.S. Senate in revenge for Sumner’s inflammatory speech about the South and its representatives. The humiliating outcome of the Civil War and a decade of Reconstruction further sensitized southerners to the haranguing of their detractors, and caused them to harden their external shell in direct proportion to the amount scathing commentary hurled their way.

The great majority of white southerners were comfortable with the region’s social structures and viewed outside criticism as uninformed. Prior to the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, the last major public introspection of the southern system was the highly spirited debate in the Virginia Legislature in 1831-1832 on whether to eliminate slavery. After two emancipation proposals were voted down, open opposition and questioning of the system became taboo. W.J. Cash argued that this intolerance for outside criticism and internal disagreement in the South flourished over time to form the core of the “Savage Ideal...whereunder dissent and variety are completely suppressed and men become, in all their attitudes, professions, and actions, virtual replicas of one another.”<sup>114</sup> Others noted this tendency as well. Historian Henry Adams, grandson of President John Quincy Adams, opined southerners “could not analyse an idea, and could not even conceive of admitting two.”<sup>115</sup> Thomas Wolfe also perceived it, writing, “[in the South] people look furtively about before even arguing the existence of truths which have been known and accepted for over a half a century.”<sup>116</sup>

Politicians and intellectuals such as Williams Jennings Bryan and the Nashville Agrarians rallied to the defence of the South. Bryan denied the fundamental assertion that the South’s racial ordering was illiberal and contended that it provided a good environment for Black people. The Agrarians took the condemnation of anti-modernism and flipped it on its head — arguing that it was the South’s highest virtue instead of a

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<sup>114</sup> Cash, *Mind of the South*, 90-91.

<sup>115</sup> Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams* (Boston: Riverside Press, 1918), 57-58.

<sup>116</sup> Hobson, *Serpent*, 30.



flaw. The average white southerner, denied the ability to intellectually joust in print, responded to criticism of his homeland with resentment and defensiveness. The constant stream of beratement caused southerners to hunker down against outsiders and hypersensitized them to remarks on all aspects of their culture, including religion, race relations, and economic structure, resulting, at least in the short run, in a hardening around the practices detested by the South's critics.

Leading the defence of the region, southern politicians strongly rejected the notion of southern fascism. William Jennings Bryan, who made his home in the South for his last two decades, offered a classic example of how southerners responded to claims of illiberalism. In an article he wrote for the *New York Times*, Bryan argued that the North would treat 'Blacks' the same or worse than the South if it found itself in the same demographic situation. He stated, "There is not a state in the Union in which the whites would permit black supremacy. The fact that the Republican States of the North never send black men to the United States Senate and House is conclusive proof either that blacks are inferior or that race prejudice keeps them in the background." Bryan charged northerners with hypocrisy noting, "the [1919] race riots in Illinois...showed that race feeling is just as strong in the North as in the South when a condition arises that gives it expression."<sup>117</sup> He was alluding a point commonly made by defenders of the South before the Civil War, that the southerners' day-to-day familiarity with African Americans fostered a type of paternalism that contrasted with the cold reception Black people received outside the South. Alexis de Tocqueville commented on this phenomenon in his nineteenth century book, *Democracy in America*, writing, "The prejudice of race appears

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<sup>117</sup> Bryan borrowed from past southern arguments with his comments. It was a typical antebellum contention that plantations offered a higher standard of living for black slaves than factories and tenements did for the free blacks living in the North. For example, Charles Pickney, a framer and signer of the United States Constitution, defended the southern racial order before Congress in 1820 saying, "Look at the free Blacks of New York and Philadelphia and compare their situation to that of slaves. You'll be told of miserable and degraded living conditions of the Blacks of New York and Philadelphia, most of whom are fugitives from the southern States...[whereas] every slave [in the South] has a comfortable house, is well fed, clothed, and taken care of; he has his family about him, and in sickness has the same medical aid as his master, and has a sure and comfortable retreat in his old age, to protect him against its infirmities and weakness," see *Niles Weekly Register, From March to September, 1820 — Vol. XVIII or Volume VI — New Series*, Baltimore: Franklin Press, 1820, 355; Speech of Charles Pinckney to Congress, February 1820, *Annals of Congress, the Sixteenth Congress First Session*, V. 2 (Washington: Governmental Printing Office, 1855), 1324-1326; William Jennings Bryan, "Bryan Says North Would Act as South on Negro Question" *New York Times*, March 18, 1923.

to be stronger in the states that have abolished slavery than those where it still exists."<sup>118</sup> This conduct continued well into the twentieth century. C. Vann Woodward noted, "it would be a simple matter to point out the many parallel lines of prejudice and discrimination against the Negro in the North, prejudice that often worked as great a hardship upon the race as it did in the South."<sup>119</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., as late as 1965, commented on hypocritical hard-heartedness of northerners in their treatment of African Americans.<sup>120</sup> Certainly, during the interwar years, prejudice and racial barriers were not just limited to the South, but were widespread across the entire United States and in some instances were worse in the non-South.<sup>121</sup> Painting the South as the America's 'fascist' region provided non-southerners an opportunity to turn a blind eye to the injustices of their own regions.

Another tactic deployed by southern politicians to defend their region was to minimize or deny the existence of the illiberal behaviours that underpinned the fascist charge. Senator Hattie Ophelia Wyatt Carraway from Arkansas (the first female to serve in the Senate) argued that the number of Black men being lynched in the South had declined by such a degree (*only* eight in 1937) that it was a *de minimis* issue not worthy of congressional attention.<sup>122</sup> Representative Maury Maverick from Texas asserted that his home region had the greatest racial tolerance of anyplace in the world.<sup>123</sup> Congressman Zebulon Weaver from North Carolina contended that southerners loved and took care of their Black folk. He queried his fellow congressmen, "And now I ask some of our northern folks, did you ever have a black mammy, any of you? These boys from the South know what it means."<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Pratt, Woodford, & Co., 1848), 389.

<sup>119</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (Oxford University Press, [1955] 2001), 113.

<sup>120</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., "Beyond the Los Angeles Riots: Next Step, the North," *Saturday Review*, November 13, 1965, 33–35, 105.

<sup>121</sup> Brian Purnell, *The Strange Careers of the Jim Crow North: Segregation and Struggle outside of the South* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 1-42.

<sup>122</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1938, Volume 83 Part 1:137.

<sup>123</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1937, Volume 82 Part 2:2036.

<sup>124</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1937, Volume 81 Part 3:3525.

Some southern politicians directly repudiated the fascist label. Representative Lindsay Warren from North Carolina exclaimed “[fascism] does not exist in the section of the country I come from.”<sup>125</sup> Senator A. Willis Robertson from Virginia claimed his home district in the Shenandoah Valley was free of any fascist influences as well as any racial or economic problems that might give root to fascist impulses.<sup>126</sup> Congressman Robsion from Kentucky maintained that there was absolutely no fascist like behaviour in his district.<sup>127</sup> Even some non-southern politicians added their voices in defence of the South. Senator William Borah from Idaho argued that any fascism in the United States was concentrated in the North and based upon his investigation did not exist “to any marked extent in the South.”<sup>128</sup>

Conservative white southern journalists constituted another line of defence against those who attempted to associate the region with fascism. While it was common for white southern newspaper editors to decry aspects of Nazism, they did not generally acknowledge similarities between the German and the southern racial practices. For instance, in the wake of the *Kristallnacht* the editors of the *Aliceville Times* of Alabama condemned the violence for leaving Jews with “fewer privileges than the Alabama Negro.” However, that was as far as the editors would go. They rejected a direct comparison to the South, arguing that African Americans had never achieved equivalent social status of German Jews and that “southern Negroes are satisfied with their status.”<sup>129</sup> Even liberal journalists that acknowledged extra-judicial parallels in violence between the Klan and the Black and Brown Shirts, denied the validity of a wider comparison between the South and the fascist states. While critical of some of the illiberal practices in the South, liberal southern journalists were proud of the gradual progress being made in the South — as demonstrated through the activity of the Inter-Regional Councils and the declining frequency of lynchings — when compared to the

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<sup>125</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1937, Volume 81 Part 3:3288.

<sup>126</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1937, Volume 81 Part 5:5555.

<sup>127</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1938, Volume 83 Part 7:7584.

<sup>128</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1937, Volume 81 Part 6:6214.

<sup>129</sup> Puckett, “Reporting on the Holocaust,” 232.

quickly deteriorating treatment of minorities in Europe.<sup>130</sup> Some liberal journalists even directly praised the fascist states, such as when Dabney credited Hitler with restoring German pride and for the implementation of eugenic-based forced sterilization programs.<sup>131</sup>

The white southern press was apt to respond defensively to any criticism of the region from outsiders. For instance, in the wake of international outrage from the *Kristallnacht*, Julius Streicher's daily paper, *Fränkische Tageszeitung*, published an article in December 1938 charging that the South was a worse place for minorities than Nazi Germany.<sup>132</sup> The *Tageszeitung* article accused the United States of being a "land of lynch justice, kidnaping, false prophets and strip dancers." It highlighted Kentucky in particular, with a story of twelve-year old girl being forced to marry a twenty-four-year-old man, and the South in general by enumerating the number of 'Negro' lynchings.<sup>133</sup> An *El Paso Times* editorial responded to the *Tageszeitung* article by noting that lynching was reserved for 'Negroes' who sexually assaulted white women.<sup>134</sup> The *Arkansas Gazette* editor countered by remarking that in Germany the persecution of Jews was state sponsored, while lynchings in the South were the act of individuals. He also defended the practice of lynching as a product of America's frontier heritage.<sup>135</sup> One letter to the editor argued that *Fränkische Tageszeitung*'s negative characterization of the South was a pure fiction. The commenter wrote, "In America all races and nationalities may dwell together as Americans, with a minimum of rancour or disturbance because of racial, religious or political differences."<sup>136</sup>

The fascist indictment of the South even set off conflict in academic circles. The Nashville Agrarians, first known as the Fugitives, were a group of intellectuals, southern

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<sup>130</sup> Kneebone, *Southern Liberal Journalists and the Issue of Race*, 181.

<sup>131</sup> Grill, "The American South and Nazi Racism," 22-23.

<sup>132</sup> William Combs, *The Voice of the SS: A History of the SS Journal 'Das Schwarze Korps'* (New York: Peter Lang, 1986), 301.

<sup>133</sup> *Arkansas Gazette*, December 1, 1938, 1.

<sup>134</sup> *El Paso Times*, December 2, 1938, 4.

<sup>135</sup> *Arkansas Gazette*, December 2, 1938, 4.

<sup>136</sup> *Arkansas Gazette*, December 5, 1938, 5.

poets and literary critics, who were centred around Vanderbilt University. They praised the South's anti-modernism and championed for its extension to the entire nation. As southerners and advocates of anti-modernism, they felt compelled to respond to the vitriol being heaped upon the South. Writers John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, and Allen Tate led this group of twelve. They no longer would remain silent in face of the attack on their shared regionalism. The Agrarians' goals were to rescue the southern idea and draw attention to the vibrancy of intellectual life in the South. In what Davidson would later label as the "Counterattack," the Agrarians published a number of essays that outlined their ideology in the book, *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (1930).<sup>137</sup> In the book's opening essay, Ransom lamented that the "southern idea today is down, and the progressive or American idea is up."<sup>138</sup> Throughout the book, the Agrarians aggressively defended the southern experience — offering praise for agrarian social structures, especially those that were reminiscent of the white aristocratic planter society — in comparison to the hardscrabble bustle of northern industrialization.<sup>139</sup> In resuscitating the virtues of the Old South, the Agrarians offered a vision of order, tradition, and stability — the idea of "the old southern gentleman and his lady, and their scorn for the dollar chasers" as an antidote to the uncertainty of a crass commercial culture.<sup>140</sup>

The Agrarians' defence of the South rested on what they maintained was the superiority of agrarianism to industrialism characterized by an overweening focus on commercial and industrial activity.<sup>141</sup> In a joint statement of principles, the Agrarians maintained that industrialism and the associated fetishization of science was soul deadening, and that discarding tradition in the name of progress was a mistake because it resulted in both the degradation of labour and degraded the values that underpin healthy societies. In other words, industrialism violates the Kantian prohibition; labour is treated

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<sup>137</sup> Maxwell, *The Indicted South*, 104. Incidentally, 'I'll take my stand' is a phrase from the song "Dixie."

<sup>138</sup> John Crowe Ransom, "Unconstructed but Unregenerate," in *I'll Take My Stand* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, [1930] 2006), 3.

<sup>139</sup> Maxwell, *The Indicted South*, 104.

<sup>140</sup> Ransom, "Unconstructed but Unregenerate" in *I'll Take My Stand*, 23.

<sup>141</sup> Brinkmeyer, *The Fourth Ghost*, 27.

as an ends instead of a means to human self-fulfilment. The Agrarians questioned why labour should be treated as an evil to be eliminated through technology, since productive labour is necessary to a happy human life and too much industrialization results in citizens cursed with the penalty of “satiety and aimlessness.” The Agrarians claimed that automation makes the worker redundant and forces the unemployed into “strange new fields” where their labour is commoditized for the production of unnecessary goods and services.<sup>142</sup>

The Agrarians further asserted that modernist practices degrade the finer aspects of human culture and religion withers as people come to believe that technology can replace the power of God. Whereas in traditional societies the God is the creator, in modern ones, marvels are produced in factories and laboratories. As the mystique of the divine is shattered as humans begin to perceive themselves equal to God through their worship of science, art and meaningful social interaction decays. They argued that the human self-actualization requires an appreciation of nature and an unhurried attitude that is contrary to the mad pace of industrialism. Manners, conversation, hospitality are all debased as human-to-human touch points become merely utilitarian elements of a commercial culture. Finally, even familial and romantic love are warped by a capitalist determinism that sterilizes every human interaction.

The Agrarians were not just pointing out problems; they had a proposed solution: to revamp the entire United States using the South as a blueprint — a society focused on agrarianism based on the idea that the “culture of the soil is the best and most sensitive of vocations.” The result would be a society reborn: “authoritarian, agrarian, classical, aristocratic.”<sup>143</sup> Through these means the social structures of the South could be preserved and transmitted to the rest of the country and the world as a vehicle to save western civilization. Ransom was convinced that the South, by virtue of the prevalence of its agrarian social structures, stood as the last bastion of civilization against the dehumanizing forces of modernity that ran rampant throughout the North, writing, “The

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<sup>142</sup> Donald Davidson, et al., “Introduction: A Statement of Principles,” in *I’ll Take My Stand*, xlvi.

<sup>143</sup> Brinkmeyer, *The Fourth Ghost*, 30.

South is unique on this continent for having founded and defended a culture which was according to European principles of culture.”<sup>144</sup>

The Agrarians’ defence of the South piqued a response from liberals. The initial critique was that the Agrarian ideas were the product of ivory tower theorists who knew nothing of the backbreaking toil involved in farming. The pushback eventually grew more heated, and the Agrarians were eventually accused of being fascists. They were vulnerable to the unwelcomed fascist comparison both as defenders of the South and as frequent contributors to *The American Review*, a publication started by fascist sympathizer Seward Collins.<sup>145</sup> Writing for this journal, Agrarian Allen Tate promoted the idea of modelling the Agrarian project along the lines of the far-right French organization, *L’Action Francaise* — a pro-royalist organization that later supported the fascist Vichy government.<sup>146</sup> In another article, meaning to satirize industrialism with outrageous proposals, he suggested in a terrifying foreshadowing of the Nazi death camps, that the enormous problem of unemployment could be solved through mass executions completed “quietly, and in the ordinary routine of industrial technology.” He proposed lethal gas as a humane mechanism for execution and suggested that the corpses

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<sup>144</sup> Ransom, “Unconstructed but Unregenerate” in *I’ll Take My Stand*, 3.

<sup>145</sup> The catalyst for the charge was when Seward Collins, the editor of the *American Review*, a journal which featured Agrarian and other anti-Modernist writers, openly shared his admiration for fascist practices and Hitler during an interview with leftist journalist Grace Lumpkin. In her subsequent article, Lumpkin excoriated Collins and explicitly linked his positions to the Agrarians. She accused the Agrarians and their anti-modernist allies of, “preparing the philosophical and moral shirt-front for Fascism,” see Grace Lumpkin, “I Want a King,” *Fight Against War and Fascism* (Vol. III, No 4), February 1936, 3, 14). In a published response to Lumpkin, Collins agrees that the Agrarian ideas are fascist, saying, “there is too much similarity between their avowed ideas and those prevalent in fascist movement to escape being called fascists,” see Seward Collins, Letter to the Editor, *New Republic* (Vol. LXXVII, No. 1123, June 10, 1936, 131-132. This unleashed the floodgate; liberal critics began to loudly identify Agrarian ideas as fascist. American journalist, Dwight MacDonald, expressed that the Agrarians’ plans, if enacted, could lead to fascism. V.F. Calverton in his essay, “The Bankruptcy of southern Culture” discussed the Agrarians in a section subtitled, “Fascism Rears Its Head.” John Chamberlin wrote in the *Saturday Review of Literature* that the Agrarians visions could lead to concentration camps like in Nazi Germany, see V.F. Calverton, “The Bankruptcy of southern Culture,” *Scribners*, May 1936, 294-298 and John Chamberlain, “Agrarianism, American Style,” *Saturday Review of Literature*, July 25 1936, 17; American novelist, Thomas Wolfe identified the Agrarians as “Potential Fascists” in 1937, see Brinkmeyer, *The Fourth Ghost*, 169.

<sup>146</sup> Brinkmeyer, *The Fourth Ghost*, 34.

be refined of their useful elements.<sup>147</sup> Unfortunately, not everyone recognized the piece as satire.

While the battle for the discourse played out among the elite, ordinary southerners bore the brunt of the derogatory comments. Already burdened by a history that rubbed defeat and humiliation into their psyche, the average white southerner had to contend with a barrage of negative identification — slurs such as ‘cracker’, ‘clay-eater’, or ‘fascist.’ The result was what historian Sheldon Hackney described as a “siege mentality.”<sup>148</sup> In response to these pressures, southerners demonstrated a hyper sensitivity to criticism, clung to their regional myths, and erected defence mechanisms such as white nationalism as a means of coping. Humiliation and the subsequent badgering had significant ramifications on southern identity. Writing before the Vietnam War, C. Vann Woodward opined that the South was excluded from the United States’ national myth of success as a result of its history of slavery, defeat, and poverty, and this exclusion was a key reason for the region’s distinctiveness.<sup>149</sup>

White southerners developed a hyper-sensitivity or fragility to criticism that was born out this ‘otherness.’ Historian Fletcher Green wrote, “the overwhelming and crushing defeat of the Confederacy left the people of the southern states with a defeatist attitude, an inferiority complex, a tender skin to criticism, and a fear of ridicule... This touchy attitude lingers on after ninety years.”<sup>150</sup> Richard Weaver wrote that the average Southerner when “pushed beyond the rather naïve assumptions with which he sanctions his world, becomes helpless and explodes in anger.”<sup>151</sup> Given their fragility, southerners became stuck in a negative feedback loop: criticism provoked a ‘siege mentality’ which

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<sup>147</sup> Allen Tate, “The Problem of the Unemployed: A Modest Proposal,” *American Review* (1933): 129-149.

<sup>148</sup> Sheldon Hackney, "Southern Violence," *The American Historical Review* 74, no. 3 (1969): 906-25.

<sup>149</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History* (Louisiana State University Press, 1960), 17-19.

<sup>150</sup> Maxwell, *The Indicted South*, 3.

<sup>151</sup> Richard M. Weaver, *The Southern Tradition at Bay: A History of Postbellum Thought*, ed. George Core and M.E. Bradford (Regnery Gateway [1968] 2021), 321.



in turn triggered defence mechanisms that reinforced southerners' fidelity to their distinctive practices which in turn lead to further criticism.

An example of the South's hyper-sensitivity surfaced when Eleanor Roosevelt voiced some mild criticism of the South in 1950. A North Carolina radio broadcaster, W.E.B. Debnam, resented it, and with what could be described as an overreaction, responded with an extended on-air rejoinder, and then subsequently published a written reply in book form. He raved that the North for the South's problems and that the region's backwardness was because of the ravaging it endured during the Civil War and economic oppression thereafter. He complained, "there was no Marshall Plan for the South eighty-five years ago," and hyperbolically compared federal occupation during Reconstruction to the fifth horseman of the apocalypse.<sup>152</sup>

In order to deal with the threat to their identity, southerners clung tightly to their regional myths. Wolfgang Schivelbusch argued that the South like other states that experienced defeats that were perceived as especially traumatic and humiliating, turned inward and formulated exculpatory social narratives, or myths, as a means of processing the humiliation. The myths serve as psychological bastions of defence for societies to retreat into to lick its wounds.<sup>153</sup> Most prominently, Schivelbusch noted that both the South and Germany embraced an exculpatory myth of redemption: for the South it was the 'Lost Cause' and for Germany it was the stab-in-the-back or *dolchstoßlegende*. He also claimed that both societies had the common experience of feeling unjustly shamed as part of the peace. For Germany this was the Versailles Treaty; for the South it was Reconstruction. The adoption of the 'Lost Cause' was an attempt by southerners to turn defeat into victory by claiming the moral high ground: the South may have been defeated but it was in the right insofar that it was fighting for freedom, liberty, and states' rights. The 'Lost Cause' benefited the South in that it provided southerners a sense of superiority even in the face of defeat. However, the balm exacted a price; the 'Lost Cause' did not so much mitigate southerners' inferiority complex as it further sensitized them against any

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<sup>152</sup> Maxwell, *The Indicted South*, 2.

<sup>153</sup> Wolfgang Schivelbusch posits a number of sociological similarities in how Germany, France, and the South dealt with military defeat and humiliation, see Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery* (New York: Picador, 2004), 16.

public criticism that ran contrary to its narrative as the image of a chosen people did not leave much room for criticism.<sup>154</sup>

When the insult of ‘fascist’ collided with southerners’ fragility and their fidelity to their exculpatory myths, the result was an ossification of the illiberal practices that so aggrieved the South’s critics. Sociologist John Shelton Reed observed, “localism, violence, and conservative religion are all plausible responses for a minority group surrounded by a culture which is viewed as powerful, hostile, and unresponsive.”<sup>155</sup> Sociologist Howard Odum declared that southern nationalism had been “greatly accentuated from without by attitudes, criticisms, and actions of other regions.”<sup>156</sup> Angie Maxwell posited that the public ridicule of the South greatly increased the necessity of cultural defence mechanisms such as white southern nationalism.<sup>157</sup> Ironically, while the South’s critics hoped to shame southerners into reforming by calling them fascists, the result, at least in the short term, was just the opposite as the invective only further entrenched the region’s fascist like practices.

### 3.5. Conclusion

On the cusp of the interwar period, Henry Adams, the descendent of president John Adams, having interacted with a number of southerners while at Harvard, including Robert E. Lee’s grandson, wrote, “As an animal, the Southerner seemed to have every advantage, but even as an animal he steadily lost ground...he was as little fit to succeed in the struggle of modern life as though he was a maker of stone axes living in caves...”<sup>158</sup> Disparagements of southerners such as this took on a new tone during the interwar period as it began to be more common to associate the South with European fascism. In addition to commentary on the peculiarities of southern character and the

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<sup>154</sup> Maxwell, *The Indicted South*, 2-19.

<sup>155</sup> Maxwell, *The Indicted South*, 11.

<sup>156</sup> Howard Odum, *Southern Regions of the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1936), 15.

<sup>157</sup> Maxwell, *The Indicted South*, 12.

<sup>158</sup> Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*, 57-58.

poverty the South, the fascist identification tarred southerners with the implication of un-American wickedness.

In this chapter the fascist charge against the South was described along with the dynamics that led to its propagation. The evolution of the allegation in the discourse was traced through the social hierarchy from its genesis, starting with communist-linked labour organizers who first made the connection based on what they saw as similar tactics in the repression of organized labour in Italy and the South, to the African American press in the wake of Nazi racial prohibitions, before finally being embedded into the mainstream discourse by white liberal journalists and politicians. The analysis revealed that there were considerable overlaps between the detractors of the South and the most frequent and vociferous critics of European fascism: liberals, socialists, Jews, and African Americans. Of this population, only Jewish voices were strident when it came to European fascism but largely missing when it came to also condemning similar southern practices. This outcome is understandable when viewed in the light of self-interest: there was a relatively small population of Jews living in the South and they were focused on avoiding unnecessary battles (from their perspective) in what could still be an anti-Semitic environment. This situation was in marked contrast to the later Civil Rights movement of the 1950s-60s when Jewish activists played a more important role in reforming the South, and it can be argued that their experiences with European fascism materially contributed to this later advocacy.

At a time when European fascism menaced the remnants of western democracy, the South increasingly stood out for its peculiar practices. Claims of backwardness and regionalism, morphed into allegations of anti-modernism and illiberalism when interpreted through the prism of European fascism. The dialogue became less focused on the material conditions and traditions of the South and more about its ideological state. With the articulation of the 'fascist charge,' practices once considered to be regional idiosyncrasies became increasingly alleged to be un-American. While in the short run, the fascist charge backfired on its purveyors, it was effective in the long-run by shifting the discourse. Discourse is more than just the spoken or written word: it represents the rules within a group that make certain types of speech possible and the expression of other ideas impermissible; it recognizes which speakers are legitimate and who should be

marginalized or discredited; and it sets the rules for what types of facts are acceptable. Discourse encompasses the visions of different worldviews and contributes to the objective and subjective reality within a worldview; as the discourse changes so does society.<sup>159</sup> The fascist allegation shifted the discourse to eventually give legitimacy to the comparison of southern practices to those of America's worst enemies.

As the allegation gained resonance after World War II, it became increasingly problematic for white southerners to continue to defend practices that smacked of fascism. In other words, the fascist charge over time proved to be a winning hand for detractors of the South as it became more and more untenable to be compared to fascist Europe. After 1941, there was an overwhelming consensus in the Western world that World War II was a battle of 'good' against 'evil,' thus the twinning of the South with fascist Europe materially contributed to the break-down of the illiberal practices that region's critics found so objectionable. While the instrumentalization of the fascist allegation as a rhetorical device was successful, the historiography is silent on its legitimacy. Was the comparison accurate or hyperbole? The next chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the issues surrounding this question across the landscape of southern practices.

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<sup>159</sup> John Toews, *Linguistic Turn and Discourse Analysis in History*, in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 2015, Vol.14, (2001): 202-207.

## 4. The South and its Connections to Fascism

The previous chapter explored how the long-standing disparagement of the South morphed into a widespread and persistent claim during the interwar period that the region resembled fascist Europe in many ways. This characterization was squarely rejected by most white southerners and caused many of them, at least in the short run, to cling more closely to those practices under attack. For all the claims and counterclaims, the fundamental question remains: was there merit in the fascist allegation or was it just a rhetorical tactic to create a hostile discourse around southern racial, labour, and political practices? And, if true, then how did the connections between the South and fascist Europe shape the region's political response to European fascism?

The objective of this chapter is to perform an empirical analysis of the connections — networks, cultural transfer, and similarities — between the South and fascist Europe. It is surprising that nowhere in the historiography is there a thorough analysis of these connections, given the extent that this allegation became such a widespread and accepted part of the public discourse by interwar contemporaries. Given the legacy of how the South has been frequently disparaged by outsiders, an examination of the fascist claim is warranted both to understand it on its merits and to provide context for South's distinctive political response to fascism.

It is reasonable to expect that if there were indeed unique similarities in practice between the South and fascist Europe, then the nature of the simpatico relationship would manifest and could be traced across the discourse and actions of southerners. Because of the South's unique historical circumstances, the region's social constructs were especially influential in the character development of its population. Faulkner provided the imagery of a southerner's worldview development in his novel *Absalom, Absalom!*. He wrote that Quentin Compson's "body was an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names; he was not a being, an entity, he was a commonwealth" as a result of "breathing the same air" as his southern brethren.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (New York: Random House, [1936] 2012), 8.

By some measures, the identification of the South as America's fascist region was incongruous. According to opinion polls, the South, more than any region of the country, was favourable to helping Britain and expressed hostility towards Nazi Germany prior to Pearl Harbour.<sup>2</sup> Nazi propaganda and recruiting efforts were stillborn in the South, and the vast majority of those who belonged to European linked fascist and nativist neo-fascist organizations lived outside the South. Southern sociologist, Howard Odum found southerners' hostility to European fascism ironic given, in his view, how the region's social structures and practices mirrored those of fascist Europe in many ways.<sup>3</sup> Odum's observation highlights a critical blind spot in how southerners perceived both their society and fascist Europe.<sup>4</sup>

Both comparative and transnational methods were used to uncover and understand the connections between the South and fascist Europe. Although these methodologies adopt different approaches, they can be regarded as siblings traveling along the same path. Practitioners of both seek to broaden understanding of the past by placing it in a wider framework and thereby gaining new perspectives.<sup>5</sup> Instead of viewing them as mutually exclusive, each fulfils a function depending on the aim. Comparative history is useful at piercing the veil of historical causality while transnational history is better attuned to investigating instances of mutual influence and the consequences of these entanglements.<sup>6</sup>

This chapter starts with a regional analysis of the membership of both European linked and nativistic fascist organizations. Next is an assessment of the claims regarding

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<sup>2</sup> Alexander DeConde, "The South and Isolationism." *The Journal of Southern History* 24, no. 3 (1958): 342; John Temple Graves, "The Fighting South," *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 18, no. 1 (Winter, 1942): 60; George Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971* (New York: Random House, 1972), 178.

<sup>3</sup> John T. Kneebone, *Southern Liberal Journalists and the Issue of Race, 1920-1944* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 175; Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2013), 278, 287.

<sup>4</sup> Referring to southerners' ability to filter reality, Lillian Smith noted, "I am deeply disturbed at the South's facility, sheer talent, for failing to see the South we all live in," quoted in Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 281.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Kolchin, "The South and the World," *Journal of Southern History* Vol. 75, No. 3 (August 2009): 579.

<sup>6</sup> Jürgen Kocka, "Comparison and Beyond," *History and Theory*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (Feb., 2003): 39-40.

the South's social structures. As elucidated in the previous chapter, the complaints about the South rested on two main pillars: anti-modernism and illiberalism. These two claims, while interlinked, are evaluated separately for a more precise analysis.<sup>7</sup>

A conclusion is reached that while claims of southern fascism were exaggerated and not substantiated by either the membership rolls of fascist organizations or by claims of anti-modernism, there were distinct and striking parallels between the South and fascist Europe regarding the illiberalism of racial ordering, labour practices, the use of violence, political structure, and related transnational exchanges. The insights developed in this chapter provide critical context for explaining how southern politicians responded to fascism (explored in Chapters 5 and 6) and expand the historiography by empirically testing the legitimacy of the hotly contested idea of southern fascism.

#### **4.1. Resident Fascists**

In 1925, the Italian government's Bureau of Fascism Abroad agency established the Fascist League of North America in order to spread Fascist ideas, especially to Italian immigrants and their progeny. Its operations were concentrated the Northeast — most notably New York, Boston, and Philadelphia — enclaves where many of the United States' 4.6 million Italian immigrants had clustered. The Fascist League encouraged members to join the Italian Fascist Party, join the Italian military, and solicited donations to support the Italian state. The League reportedly attracted two thousand Italian Americans into the Fascist Party and claimed a membership of approximately twelve

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<sup>7</sup> The term 'modern' is used in this thesis to signal the application of advanced economic and technological practices, as well as a culture that prioritizes embracing the future over clinging to the past. Fascist illiberalism is characterized those social structures most commonly associated with fascism by Americans as discussed in the previous chapter: lack of democratic representation, the suppression of civil liberties, a racial hierarchy supported by violence, and the repression of organized labor. Equating the advancement of liberal values with modernity was a long tradition within American thinking. John O'Sullivan, an influential American nationalist who coined the term "Manifest Destiny," in the nineteenth century wrote, "and so far, as regards the entire development of the natural rights of man, in moral, political, and national life, we may confidently assume that our country is destined to be the great nation of futurity," see John O'Sullivan, "The Great Nation of Futurity," 1839.

thousand before it was dissolved by the Italian government for public relations reasons in 1930. The League and its progeny had no material presence in the South.<sup>8</sup>

The Nazi Party also worked to proselyte its ideology throughout the United States. Efforts to recruit Americans began in 1924 with the establishment of the locally organized Teutonia Society in Chicago with additional branches opening in Detroit and New York City by the end of the decade. In 1933, the Teutonia Society and other groups claiming to represent Naziism in America were disbanded and were superseded by a new organization that was officially supported by the Nazi Party, Friends of New Germany. Friends was headquartered in Chicago but was most active in New York City spreading Nazi propaganda and organizing meetings. Under diplomatic pressure from the United States, the German government disbanded Friends in 1936. It was almost immediately replaced by the German-American Bund which was headquartered in New York City. The Bund held large rallies in New York City and marched together along with the American Black Shirt followers of Mussolini at its one-hundred-acre Camp Nordland in New Jersey. The U.S. Justice Department estimated the Bund had approximately 8,000 committed members before World War II. Some historians have disagreed, maintaining the membership ranged between 30,000 to 100,000. Regardless of the numbers, what is undisputed was that these members resided primarily in the non-South, dwelling in cities such as New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia.<sup>9</sup>

The Nazis had high hopes that they would be able to recruit southerners to their cause based the seemingly similar worldviews about race. These aspirations turned out to be stillborn. A 1946 U.S. Army report based on captured records from occupied Germany calculated that less than two percent of American Nazis lived in the South.<sup>10</sup> In 1940, a

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<sup>8</sup> The coordinating activities of the disbanded Bureau was almost immediately replaced by the non-governmental voluntary organizations that worked together under the 'Lictor Federation.' This included the previously apolitical Sons of Italy Order which claimed over 200,000 members. During the 1930s its chapters were steadily brought within the control of Mussolini loyalists. The effort to woo Italian immigrants paid off during the Ethiopian War. With the assistance of Italian diplomatic officials, over one thousand Italians from America volunteered to join the Italian military. Italian-Americans contributed to fund raising drives, including gifts of wedding rings and copper post cards, see Morris Schonbach, *Native American Fascism During the 1930s and 1940s* (PhD diss., University of California, 1958), 73-90.

<sup>9</sup> Bradley Hart, *Hitler's American Friends: The Third Reich's Supporters in America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2018), 27-36.

<sup>10</sup> Grill and Jenkins, "The Nazis and the American South in the 1930s: A Mirror Image?," 670, 682.



Congressional Special Committee encamped in Texas to investigate the possible presence of fascist activity in the German-populated Hill Country region. The committee subpoenaed editors of local German language newspapers and veterans of the Imperial German Army who had settled in Texas. After a month of hearings, the committee having discovered almost nothing, moved on to a more fertile endeavour of hunting communists in Hollywood.<sup>11</sup> New York's Jewish congressman, Sam Dickstein, in his 'name and shame' campaign against American fascists consistently highlighted fascist activity in the Northeast and Midwest and never argued for its presence in the South.<sup>12</sup> When Dickstein released a list of names of suspected American fascists into the Congressional Record on July 26 and August 19, 1937 in an attempt to expose these individuals, none of them were southerners.<sup>13</sup>

What accounted for the Nazis' failure to spread their message and garner recruits in a region that appeared to harbour similar racial structures as Nazi Germany? One reason was the allocation of resources. During the early part the 1930s Nazi propagandists prioritized their efforts outside the South. As a result, as late as 1935, there were no German Bund chapters south of Virginia. When the Nazis finally pushed to expand the Bund into the South, they met resistance from local branches of the Klan. Xenophobic and suspicious of outsiders, southern Klaverns did not welcome the spread of the Bund or other competing organizations such as the America First Committee into their territory.<sup>14</sup> With expansion of the Bund stymied, German consular officials ramped-up direct diplomatic and propaganda efforts in 1935 with visits to ethnic German towns. Welcomed and accompanied by prominent local, state, and national politicians, Nazi

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<sup>11</sup> The Committee found that Hans Ackerman, the editor of the *Texas Herold*, was given a free trip to Germany at the expense of the Nazi government during which he met with Rudolph Hess and was given propaganda materials. "Dies Probe will Open Monday," *Austin American Statesman*, July 4, 1940, 5; "Dies to Quiz German Language Press Editors First," *Austin American Statesman*, July 5, 1940, 9; August Ogden, *The Dies Committee: A Study of the Special House Committee for the Investigation of Un-American Activities, 1938-1944* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University Press, 1945), 211; U.S. Congress, Investigation into Un-American Activities in the United States, "Report on the Axis Front Movement in the United States," 1943, 75-76.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1937, Volume 81 Part 7:8145.

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1937, Volume 81 Part 7:7629; U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1937, Volume 81 Part 8: 9401.

<sup>14</sup> Grill and Jenkins, "The Nazis and the American South," 669; Hart, *Hitler's American Friends*, 203.

consuls took advantage of these outings to praise the accomplishments of the Third Reich.<sup>15</sup>

In an effort to make further headway in the region, the German Foreign Institute launched a formal program in 1938 to win the hearts and minds of ethnic German southerners. It was focused on the German communities in Texas, as they were the largest in the South, and in Louisiana. The initiative supported a German/American youth exchange program, the distribution of propaganda materials, and facilitation of international correspondence between Americans and Germans.<sup>16</sup> Consular officials continued their charm offensive by making visits throughout the region, including on Christmas Day.<sup>17</sup> They also attempted to use local German language papers to spread their message. Surreptitiously, they submitted disguised 'letters to the editor,' to convey the message that ethnic Germans owed their allegiance to the fatherland regardless of their current residence.<sup>18</sup> They also pressured editors (sometimes menacingly) for friendly reporting and disseminated propaganda to these papers sourced from the Transocean News Service, an arm of the Nazi Foreign Office and the Propaganda Ministry.<sup>19</sup>

Nazi efforts in the South yielded few results. German-Americans in Texas and Louisiana generally held a low opinion of Hitler and National Socialism, and most of the region's German-American newspapers were unfriendly to the Nazi regime. Anecdotes from two heavily ethnic German towns in Texas provide additional colour. In Fredericksburg, the city council changed the name of its market square from

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<sup>15</sup> "German Envoy on Social Tour Will Visit Here," *Fredericksburg (Texas) Standard*, January 17, 1935,1-2; "Dr. Hans Luther Entertained at Fredericksburg," *Fredericksburg (Texas) Standard*, January 24, 1935,1,3; "German Consul to Visit Here," *Fredericksburg (Texas) Standard*, October 31, 1935,1. "German Consul to Visit Here Next Saturday," *Fredericksburg (Texas) Standard*, November 7, 1935,1. "Social Notes," *Fredericksburg (Texas) Standard*, November 14, 1935,1.

<sup>16</sup> Grill and Jenkins, "The Nazis and the American South," 680.

<sup>17</sup> "German Consul Visited Here Last Sunday," *Fredericksburg (Texas) Standard*, November 25, 1937,1; "German Consul Spends Christmas Here," *Fredericksburg (Texas) Standard*, December 30, 1937,1.

<sup>18</sup> "Dies Shows Germans in Other Countries Owe Allegiance to Fatherland," *Austin American Stateman*, July 8 1940, 1.

<sup>19</sup> U.S. House of Representatives, 77th Cong., 1st sess., House Report no. 1, January 3, 1941, 7.

*Adolphsplatz* to *Der Marktplatz* in 1937 to dissociate the town from the Third Reich.<sup>20</sup> The following year, the residents of New Braunfels refused a request by a German consul to fly the Nazi flag at an Oktoberfest celebration. In correspondence with the German Foreign Institute, individual German-Americans living in the South expressed their satisfaction with the living and working conditions in the U.S. as compared to Germany.<sup>21</sup> Their heritage may have played a role in resisting the Nazi's overtures, as many of their forefathers had immigrated in the wake of the failed 1848 liberal revolution in Prussia. Frederick Law Olmstead in his 1854 travelogue of Texas noted that these refugees were liberal minded and characterized by "their democratic tendencies."<sup>22</sup>

The importance of religion in southern life was another bulwark against the lure of Nazism. The German Foreign Institute found that Texas German-American Lutheran and Catholic churches were opposed to Nazism.<sup>23</sup> Prior to 1936, Southern Baptists preachers in general refrained from denouncing the National Socialism and even held the fifth Baptist World Congress in Berlin in 1934.<sup>24</sup> Even so, there were some prominent Baptist voices that publicly decried Nazism, such as J.M. Dawson, a Baptist pastor from Waco, Texas.<sup>25</sup> As early as 1934, Dawson preached from the pulpit that fascism was incompatible with the Baptist faith.<sup>26</sup> By 1936, isolated anti-fascist Baptist voices became a chorus as other leading Southern Baptists began writing about the menace of Nazism. Southern Methodists also expressed their unhappiness about Hitler's suppression of the Christianity.<sup>27</sup> Given the importance of religion in the personal and social lives of most

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<sup>20</sup> Ken Knopp, *Hin nach Texas! Off to Texas!: The Germans of the Hill Country* (Fredericksburg: Author Published, 2000), 300. Manuscript held at the Pioneer Memorial Library in Fredericksburg, Texas.

<sup>21</sup> Grill and Jenkins, "The Nazis and the American South," 681.

<sup>22</sup> Fredrick Law Olmstead, *A Journey Through Texas* (New York: Dix, Edwards & Co., 1857), 429 – 433.

<sup>23</sup> Grill and Jenkins, "The Nazis and the American South," 681.

<sup>24</sup> Dan Puckett, "Reporting on the Holocaust: The View from Jim Crow Alabama," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 25, no. 2 (Fall 2011), 231.

<sup>25</sup> Waco is located in central Texas, a region that was home to many ethnic Germans during interwar period. Dr. Joseph Martin Dawson was a noted author on church-state issues, and the first Executive Director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs (1947-1954).

<sup>26</sup> *The Waco News Tribune*, July 16, 1934, 1,5.

<sup>27</sup> Puckett, "Reporting on the Holocaust," 231-232.

southerners at this time, the opposition of religious leaders was a substantial impediment to the spread of a European flavoured fascism. For these reasons, the Nazis were unable get traction with southerners; in frustration, the Nazis significantly scaled back their efforts in the South in 1939.

While southerners proved unreceptive to imported fascism, how active were they in home grown organizations open to fascist ideas? As in Europe, the economic dislocations caused by the Great Depression shook many Americans' confidence in liberal-democratic institutions. These concerns along with a lingering fear of Bolshevism provide rich soil for the proliferation of a number of nativist right-wing organizations. One such group was the Silver Shirts. Founded by William Pelley in 1933, it represented the most direct effort to emulate Hitler's Nazi Party in the United States.<sup>28</sup> The group attracted approximately fifteen thousand members concentrated on the West Coast and claimed few members in the South.<sup>29</sup> The Black Legion was another prominent native fascistic group that was estimated to have about forty thousand members who were concentrated around Detroit. During the 1930s, preacher and Nazi admirer, Gerald B. Winrod, published the pro-Nazi *Defender Magazine*. The bulk of his one hundred thousand paid subscriptions were to non-southerners.<sup>30</sup> While the Ku Klux Klan was founded in and most often associated with the South, the majority of its members resided outside the South during the interwar period.<sup>31</sup> The top five states for Klan membership were Indiana, Ohio, Texas, Pennsylvania, and Illinois.<sup>32</sup> Walter White, head of the NAACP, wrote that he was alarmed at the spread of the Klan "not only throughout the

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<sup>28</sup> Bradley Hart, *Hitler's American Friends* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2018), 72.

<sup>29</sup> Schonbach, *Native American Fascism*, 307; Grill and Jenkins, "The Nazis and the American South," 679.

<sup>30</sup> Schonbach, *Native American Fascism*, 316, 322.

<sup>31</sup> "Among regions, the North Central and Southwestern states enrolled the most members, followed by the Southeast, the Midwest, the Far West, and North Atlantic," see Nancy Maclean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 9; While in terms of raw numbers, non-southern Klan members outnumbered their southern brethren, the Klan's Dixie twang was a function of its higher degree of social acceptance in the South, see George Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971* (New York: Random House, 1972), 70.

<sup>32</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930* (Oxford University Press, 1967), Table 8, 237.

South but in Northern states such as Indiana, New York, and Massachusetts.”<sup>33</sup> The one attempted fascist coup to overthrow of the United States government was instigated by a group of non-southerners. In 1934, a New York stockbroker, Gerald MacGuire, funded by committee of Wall Street bankers, made a tour of Europe to gain an understanding of the connection between veteran movements and the spread of fascism. Upon his return, he attempted to recruit U.S. Marine General Smedley Butler to lead march of veterans on Washington D.C. to affect a fascist coup and overturn Roosevelt’s ‘socialist’ New Deal policies. Smedley refused to cooperate and the plot was revealed.<sup>34</sup> This trend extended to anti-Semitism. The non-South hosted the substantial majority of the one hundred and twenty-one anti-Semitic organizations active during the interwar years.<sup>35</sup>

While the South’s critics identified the region as the most fascist area in the country, this claim is not supported by southerners’ relative participation in both European and home-grown fascist organizations. In spite of these facts, the South alone was tarred as the fascist region of the United States. If these comparisons of the South to fascist Europe were only made only by radical leftists, then they might be dismissed purely as ideological propaganda. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, to view southern society alongside fascist Europe during the interwar years was part of the public discourse. Even though the membership of fascist and quasi-fascist organizations was largely non-southern, some would still indict the region based on its anti-modern, illiberal, and racist practices.

## 4.2. Anti-Modernism

There is a peculiar tendency to describe things we don’t like as belonging to the past, even though there is no teleological syllogism that *a priori* implies that ‘modern’ equates to the ‘good’ or ‘right.’ Even so, this was one of the arguments used by the South’s critics to tie the region to European fascism. While the South’s relative poverty

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<sup>33</sup> Walter White, *A Man Called White: The Autobiography of Walter White* (New York: Viking Press, 1948), 56.

<sup>34</sup> Fronczak, “The Fascist Game,” 564.

<sup>35</sup> Grill and Jenkins, “The Nazis and the American South,” 669.

gave credence to the claim that the region was backwards in a material or economic sense, was there a connection between its penurious condition and something in the southern mind that resisted modernity? Were white southerners, as W.J. Cash asserted, pseudo-Doric overlords imitating ancient Sparta, or ‘feudal’ as President Roosevelt claimed?<sup>36</sup> Against these charges, it would be difficult to defend lower class southerners who were enmeshed in a hardscrabble rural lifestyle. Who would not be considered on the margins of modernity growing up illiterate on a subsistence farm?<sup>37</sup> Instead, consideration of the southern elite provides a more informative lens into the mind of the South. The interwar southern elite embraced modernism, but a modernism suited to their own specific regional needs, especially when it came race relations.

Before evaluating the allegation of southern anti-modernism made by progressives such as H.L. Mencken, W.J. Cash, Harold Odum, and President Roosevelt, it is worth a moment to reflect upon how American elites understood the relationship between anti-modernism and fascism. Senator Thomas Schall from Minnesota speaking of the Nazis stated, “Do you want to establish here another Germany, and return to the Dark Ages.” Representative William Citron from Connecticut asserted that Hitler’s state of mind was “ancient and medieval.” Senator William Henry King from Utah declared, “Germany now, under the Nazi regime, manifests those atavistic qualities that were apparent in barbarous ages of the past.”<sup>38</sup> The *Los Angeles Times* castigated the Nazi state with a front-page cartoon that presented them as barbarians, titled “A Throw-back to the Dark Ages.”<sup>39</sup> These examples indicate the correlation many drew between anti-modernism and fascism.

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<sup>36</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, Address at Gainesville, Georgia, March 23, 1938, The American Presidency Project.

<sup>37</sup> The rural illiteracy rate in the South was approximately twice that of the non-South in the 1930s. Average income was approximately one-half of that of the non-South and half the houses in the region were hovels without running water, see Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1930*, 34; Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself*, 171–172.

<sup>38</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1935, Volume 79 Part 6:6116; U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1935, Volume 79 Part 13:13747; U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1939, Volume 84 Part 6:5805.

<sup>39</sup> *The Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, California), Sun, April 2, 1933, 1.

However, while fascist leaders espoused anti-modern ideas as part of their rhetoric, anti-modernism was by no means fascism's most telling characteristic. There were some elements that were clearly anti-modern such as the appeal to past glory and the degradation of modern art (e.g., the Nazi organized *Entartete Kunst* or Degenerate Art exhibit in 1937), as well as social policies that pushed women out of the workforce to be homemakers and to “give birth, give birth again, to always be giving birth.”<sup>40</sup> There are a number of counter-points that challenge the anti-modernist conception. Both the German and Italian states aggressively pursued industrial modernization, embraced technology, and perpetuated sophisticated racial states. Georges Valois, the founder the *Faisceau*, an interwar French fascist league, conceived of fascism as a hyper-modern agent for the purpose of improving economic and governmental efficiency.<sup>41</sup> In an attempt to square these apparently contradictory facts, Zeev Sternhell conjectured that while fascism was a reaction to the “dehumanization of modernity,” the regimes were eager to retain the benefits of progress and technology.<sup>42</sup> Expanding on this idea, Katy Hull in her book, *The Machine Has No Soul* (2021), contended that Fascist Italy appealed to some Americans because it seemed to harness the benefits of modernity while upholding tradition, religion, and family.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, since anti-modernism was an element of the fascist charge made against the South, the cogency of the claim is explored.

During the interwar period, living standards in the agricultural focused South dropped relative to the rest of the country fostering an environment of poverty and foreclosure.<sup>44</sup> By 1932 the average income in the South was less than half of that in other

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<sup>40</sup> Both the Italian Fascist and Nazi states offered special recognition to the most fertile mothers. In the Reich, the award was the Mother's Cross, see Reichsleitung der NSDAP, Hauptamt für Erzieher (NSLB), *Du und dein Volk* (Munich: Deutscher Volksverlag, 1940); Chris Millington, *A History of Fascism in France* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 11.

<sup>41</sup> Samuel Kalman, *The Extreme Right in Interwar France: The Faisceau and the Croix de Feu* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008), 15.

<sup>42</sup> Zeev Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology*, 6.

<sup>43</sup> Katy Hull, *The Machine Has a Soul: American Sympathy with Italian Fascism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 18.

<sup>44</sup> Per capita income fell 32% percent from 1929 to 1931 in the South compared 25% for the non-South, see Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South*, 360; For example, in 1933 a third of the farmers in Nueces County, Texas faced the prospect of foreclosure, see Sarah Phillips, *This Land, This Nation* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 155.

areas of the country: \$203 compared to \$448.<sup>45</sup> This regional differential resulted in schools that were pitifully underfunded as compared to the rest of the nation: with one-third of the country's children it had just one-sixth of the funding. Over half the homes in the South were hovels that lacked running water.<sup>46</sup> The relative poverty and poor material conditions of the South served as fodder for those who perceived the South as backwards.

Another key allegation of southern backwardness revolved around its racial state — comprised both of *de jure* Jim Crow legislation and *de facto* customs that tolerated vigilante violence.<sup>47</sup> W.J. Cash argued that the region's "consuming monomania" to maintain its racial state was underpinned by white southerners' tendency to incline their minds towards the past and away from the present.<sup>48</sup> However, while the South's racial state may have been intended from a practical perspective to re-establish the *antebellum* racial hierarchy, it was by no means a backward system. It might have been illiberal but it was a modern construct. The South's critics mistakenly perceived Jim Crow as anti-modern because they judged it by its intent to recapture a bygone era, rather than by its mechanisms.

It was not uncommon for racial states like the South to co-opt the instruments of modernism to establish and enforce a racial hierarchy.<sup>49</sup> A key component of the modern state is an administrative ordering of nature and its population to make society more legible and ease classic state functions such as taxation and conscription. Examples of state sponsored classification includes censuses, the creation of permanent last names, and cadastral surveys.<sup>50</sup> In service of this administrative ordering, the modern state seeks

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<sup>45</sup> Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South*, 360.

<sup>46</sup> Katznelson, *Fear Itself*, 171-172.

<sup>47</sup> David Goldberg described the purpose of racial states, "to regulate through the rule of race, to impose race upon a population so as to manage and control, divide and rule," see David Goldberg, *The Racial State* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 122.

<sup>48</sup> Cash, *Mind of the South*, li; Cash, *The Mind of the South*, 168.

<sup>49</sup> Goldberg, *The Racial State*, 123; John Cell, *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy: The Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the American South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 12.

<sup>50</sup> James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 2.



to monopolize the identification of what is measured, named, and categorized.<sup>51</sup> The confluence of identification with the state's police power creates a new reality for that which has been identified. For instance, a cadastral map is more than a description of property boundary lines since it also conveys the force of law for the protection of property rights. Modern states promoted racial classification for the purpose of reducing uncertainty and promoting stability.<sup>52</sup> Historian Grace Elizabeth Hale argued that racial identity in the United States "became the paramount spatial mediation of modernity," as American elites found race a useful concept to support social order to counteract the inclination towards fragmentation inherent in modernity.<sup>53</sup> Racial classification gave the state another lever to control its population and to expand its power.<sup>54</sup> And indeed, racial thinking proved immensely utilitarian to the modern state; beyond justifying slavery and imperialism, it stabilized capitalism in many regions of the world.<sup>55</sup>

As a sophisticated modern state project, Jim Crow elicited pride among white southerners.<sup>56</sup> Supported by both southern conservatives and progressives, it was intended to facilitate social stability while providing (it was argued) an environment where African Americans could develop their potential over time.<sup>57</sup> Racial ordering permeated every aspect of southern society including the criminal justice system, where imprisoned Blacks became fodder for the modern state by providing the overwhelming amount of forced labour used for the extraction of raw materials and construction of paved roads in parts of the South.<sup>58</sup> The South's racial state was a successful construct,

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<sup>51</sup> Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity'," *Theory and Society* 29, no. 1 (2000), 15.

<sup>52</sup> Goldberg, *The Racial State*, 37, 149.

<sup>53</sup> Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 7-9.

<sup>54</sup> Goldberg, *The Racial State*, 23.

<sup>55</sup> Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 19.

<sup>56</sup> It has been argued that the racial state is "the paradigmatically modern social formation," enacted by the instrumentalities of governance, new technology, and scientific justification by the modern state, see Goldberg, *Racial State*, 148-149.

<sup>57</sup> Dewey Grantham, *Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), xix, 125.

<sup>58</sup> "By 1915, Georgia had 13,000 of rural surfaced roads, more than any other southern state and fifth in the United States overall, most of which was constructed through chain gang labor." Chain gangs were

insofar that it maintained social stability while accommodating the prevailing southern idea of white superiority in an increasingly uncertain world marked by the urbanization and industrialization of the New South.<sup>59</sup>

With Jim Crow, the South offered the world a thorough and sophisticated system of racial control. President Harding in a 1921 speech recommended Jim Crow as a model for race relations for the rest of the country and also the world.<sup>60</sup> Under the auspices of Woodrow Wilson, the federal government's embrace of segregation reached a new level. After the end of World War I and in the wake of the 'red summer' race riots, segregation became further entrenched outside the South. Even Republicans, the party of Lincoln, excluded Black delegates from its official hotels in 1928. The South's racial state also influenced U.S. foreign policy. Jim Crow served as a governance model under the auspices of southerners assigned to govern Haiti during its occupation by U.S. military forces from 1915 to 1934.<sup>61</sup>

Southern hosted World Fairs were another vehicle that signalled southern modernity. World Fairs in the region during the 1890s became grander and more significant, as exemplified by the World Fairs in Atlanta (1895) and Nashville (1897). These were followed by fairs in Charleston (1901), Norfolk (1907), and Dallas (1936). Historian Nathan Cardon argued that these fairs were "celebrations of modernity" — events where the utopian dreams of industrial capitalism were forged.<sup>62</sup> Just as the Nazis

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largely comprised of African Americans, sometimes comprising ninety to ninety-five percent of the chain gang population. Even Black women were assigned to the gangs, although in Georgia Black female convicts sometimes had the option to serve out their sentences as servants for white families. Almost two thousand black women labored in Georgia's chain gangs between 1908 and 1936, compared to just four white women, see Sarah Haley, *No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity*, University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 4-12, 158-161; Alex Lichtenstein, "Good Roads and Chain Gangs in the Progressive South: The Negro Convict Is a Slave," *The Journal of Southern History* 59, no. 1 (1993): 97.

<sup>59</sup> Cell, *The Highest Stage*, 18.

<sup>60</sup> Warren G. Harding, "Address of the President of the United States at the Celebration of the Semicentennial Founding of the City of Birmingham, Alabama," October 21, 1921, accessed via *Voices of Democracy*, University of Maryland; W.E.B. Du Bois also shared this point of view. In his book, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), he stated "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line..."

<sup>61</sup> Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York: Norton, 2008), 21-22.

<sup>62</sup> Nathan Cardon, *A Dream of the Future: Race, Empire, and Modernity at the Atlanta and Nashville World's Fairs* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 3.

used the Berlin Olympics (1936) and Paris World Fair (1937) to highlight their progress, southerners sponsored World Fairs in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century for the purposes of promoting the story of the New South's modernity. The Fairs supported southern progress by providing a showcase to woo outside investment for the quickening of industrialization and by creating venues to educate local fairgoers how to be modern citizens. While the southern elites advocated for modernity, it was not a call for a cultural revolution. Progress would be tempered in accordance with traditional southern racial and political structures.

The allegation of anti-modernity is thus not a persuasive argument that the South mirrored fascist Europe. For one, while European fascist leaders espoused anti-modern ideas as part of their rhetoric, anti-modernism was by no means fascism's least ambiguous characteristic. Secondly, the evidence does not support the claim that the southern elite, whether conservative or progressive, held an anti-modern mindset. Southern elites encouraged a modern and industrialized South — a 'New South.' Even so, modernization was only welcome to the extent it was compatible with the South's traditional southern social structures and practices. African Americans were welcomed to participate in this journey, but only in a subservient role.

### **4.3. Illiberalism and Race**

So far the fascist allegation against the South is unsubstantiated: neither the number of individuals who were part of fascist organizations nor the region's alleged anti-modernism support the claim. However, the argument rests upon steadier ground with an investigation into the South's failure to hew to liberal principles. With liberalism as a lens, historians Isaiah Berlin, Zeev Sternhell, and Federico Finchelstein provide an intellectual framework for examining the connection between the South and the fascist states. Each has argued that illiberal ideas are the raw material that comprise the ideological building blocks that underpin fascism.<sup>63</sup> The following explores the

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<sup>63</sup> Isaiah Berlin, "Counter-Enlightenment," in *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); Federico Finchelstein, *Transatlantic Fascism: Ideology, Violence, and the Sacred in Argentina and Italy, 1919-1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Zeev

intersection of Americans' perception of fascism (a system hostile to democracy, civil liberties, organized labour, and racial equality) with the specific claims against the South with a focus on common root causes, parallel practices, and transnational exchanges.

The analysis of the region's illiberal practices starts with the South's racial state. While racism was only perceived as a secondary characteristic of fascism by most Americans, over time it became the primary and most damaging claim that the South mirrored European fascism. Even though the South and the fascist states were lambasted for their racist social structures, they were by no means unique in this regard. The United States and many other western nations utilized race as a basis for public policy including involuntary sterilization based on eugenic principles.<sup>64</sup> The eugenics movement reached peak respectability in the United States in the 1920s. Eugenics was taught in high schools and universities and was supported by academic journals and civic associations that spread the ideas of scientific racism. Even future president Franklin Roosevelt expressed his support for eugenics when he wrote in 1925 that immigration was "in the first place, a question of selection ...[and] a little new European blood *of the right sort* [emphasis added] does a lot of good in every community."<sup>65</sup> However the movement began to lose respectability by the early 1930s partially due to the efforts of scientists such as Franz Boas who emphasized environment over heredity as well as new findings from the growing field of genetics.<sup>66</sup> Within this context, Nazi racial policies through the mid-1930s did not diverge significantly from the mainstream Western acceptance of a racial

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Sternhell, "Fascism: Reflections on the Fate of Ideas in Twentieth Century History," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 5, no. 2 (June 2000): 141.

<sup>64</sup> Alison Bashford, *Global Population - History, Geopolitics, and Life on Earth* (Columbia University Press, 2016), 107; *Buck V. Bell*, 274 U.S. 200 (1927), referenced via Oyez; Mazower, *Dark Continent*, 78, 96.

<sup>65</sup> As president Roosevelt did very little to advance the causes of African Americans claiming to be politically bound by the southern caucus. He even declined to send congratulations to black athletes who gold medaled at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, including Jessie Owens. As late as 1943, FDR asked his staff to report back on the alleged racial superiority of northern to southern Italians, see Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 193; Steve Usdin, "New Documents Reveal FDR's Eugenic Project to 'Resettle' Jews During World War II", *Tablet*, April 30, 2018.

<sup>66</sup> Jonathan Spiro, *Defending the Master Race: Conservation, Eugenics, and the Legacy of Madison Grant* (Burlington, Vermont: University of Vermont Press, 2008), 334.

hierarchy.<sup>67</sup> While the American public embraced eugenics thinking longer than the scientific community, support was eventually diminished by its association with fascism.

Given this environment where racism was not only accepted but formed the basis for public policy in America and Europe, why was the South singled out for its connections to fascism? Historian George Fredrickson argued there was something distinct about the interwar South and Nazi Germany. He distinguished the South, Nazi Germany, and South Africa “overtly racist regimes” based upon the degree by which they codified racial goals into law and made racial objectives a central concern of public policy. In Fredrickson’s three-point classification framework, the most important differentiating factor is that “segregation is mandated by law and not merely the product of custom or private acts of discrimination that are tolerated by the state.” As “overtly racist regimes,” the South, Hitler’s Germany, and as will be demonstrated, Fascist Italy, were distinct by the depth of legislative racial controls they enacted and the importance of these controls to realizing other elements of their social agenda.<sup>68</sup> To explore the validity of this hypothesis, the formal and informal racial state structures, ideological underpinnings, and transnational exchanges related to the South, Fascist Italy, and Nazi Germany are assessed in the following sections.

#### **4.3.1. Racial Legislation**

While race-based policies were used by both the Italian Fascists and the Nazis to achieve national objectives, they were far more prevalent in Germany than in Italy. Hitler’s social policies were fundamentally rooted in racial logic. Hitler wrote, “All world historical events are nothing more than the expression of the self-preservation of the races for better or worse.” and “if I can accept a divine commandment, it’s this one: ‘Thou shall preserve the species.’”<sup>69</sup> Jews were his primary target, but he was also contemptuous

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<sup>67</sup> Of course, with the Nazi state it was always a matter of the degree to which it applied otherwise commonly held principles of the time; the Nazi state force sterilized over 200,000 people, while the number in the U.S. was slightly over 3,000, see Mazower, *Dark Continent*, 100.

<sup>68</sup> George Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton University Press, 2015), 100 – 101.

<sup>69</sup> Tim Snyder, *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning* (New York: Crown Publishing, 2015), 3-6.

of other ‘lower’ races such as Blacks and certain groups of gypsies such as the Sinti and Roma. For a time, the regime in Italy was less race focused and there were a number of Fascist Jews. Mussolini even kept a Jewish mistress. For the majority of Mussolini’s rule, racism in Fascist Italy was less ideological than utilitarian and was aimed primarily against Slavs and Africans as justification for Italian expansionism in the Adriatic region and Africa. While Jewish-Italian persecution began legislatively in the late 1930s, this population only became subject the worst horrors after Mussolini was installed by the Nazis as the leader of the Salò Republic in 1943.<sup>70</sup>

In Germany, the journey to the ‘Final Solution’ was propelled in the first half of the 1930s by a legislative campaign — most notably the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service in 1933 and the Nuremberg Laws issued in September 1935 — meant to make the Reich increasingly inhospitable for Jews and other minorities so that they would voluntarily leave.<sup>71</sup> While these laws and decrees also impacted Black Germans, they were not a prime target because there were relatively few in Germany in the 1930s — between twenty to twenty-five thousand — and were considered so intellectually inferior it was generally thought that they posed no risk to the Reich. Jews, on the other hand, were viewed as a serious threat because of their supposed cunning, collectively “planning the enslavement and with it the destruction of all non-Jewish

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<sup>70</sup> After the Germans had rescued Mussolini from his mountain prison, they restored him in the north as ruler of the Italian Social Republic that was essentially a puppet state under Hitler’s control.

<sup>71</sup> The Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service was passed in April 1933. It stipulated that ‘non-Aryans’ were to retire or be dismissed from civil service jobs. A related decree later that month put prohibitions on Jewish physicians, teachers, and students. The number of Jewish students was limited to no more than 1.5 percent of a school’s student body. About one-third of Germany’s university teaching staff, including twenty-four Nobel laureates, eventually emigrated in the wake of these prohibitions. The Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service was passed in April 1933. It stipulated that ‘non-Aryans’ were to retire or be dismissed from civil service jobs. A related decree later that month put prohibitions on Jewish physicians, teachers, and students. The number of Jewish students was limited to no more than 1.5 percent of a school’s student body. About one-third of Germany’s university teaching staff, including twenty-four Nobel laureates, eventually emigrated in the wake of these prohibitions. The next wave of racial legislation came in 1935. Non-Aryans were banned from the German military with the Military Service Law of May 1935. The Nuremberg Laws issued in September 1935, affected Jews, Blacks, and Gypsies by forbidding marriage and sexual relations between Aryans and non-Aryans. Jews were redefined as ‘subjects’ thus converting them into second-class citizens. Government benefits and subsidies were restricted. In November, Jews were formally disenfranchised under the first decree of the Reich Citizenship Law. In January 1937, the Law on the Punishment of Juvenile Offenders stipulated the results of a racial-biological examination to be considered in the length and type of sentencing of the convicted, see Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann, *The Racial State: Germany 1933 - 1945* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), 18-87.

peoples.”<sup>72</sup> Nonetheless Nazis did not hesitate to paint both Jewish and Black people with the same brush. For example, leading Nazi architect Paul Schultze-Naumburg, who was a well-known theorist on the linkage between race and architecture, noted how, “lower races are unabashed in their adulation of higher races. Particularly with regard to women, one can observe again and again the way the Jew (and the Negro) lasciviously lust after and seduces the Nordic woman.”<sup>73</sup>

While the Nazis detested the idea of white-Black miscegenation, its encouragement was laid at the feet of the Jews, who they believe fostered it purposefully to weaken the white race to make it easier to rule.<sup>74</sup> While not viewing its Black population as an existential threat, the Nazis had an unequivocal negative view of them. Alfred Rosenberg proclaimed the Nazis should ban any “niggers” from entering the new Reich.<sup>75</sup> Hitler remarked that he would “never even shake the hands with one of them” and that the killing of ‘Blacks’ was the “justice of the lord.”<sup>76</sup> In *Mein Kampf* he referred to Blacks as “half apes” unsuitable for advanced education.<sup>77</sup> Nazi anti-Black racism even extended into the arts. Jazz music was suppressed due to its African roots and Black entertainers were harassed and then later blocked from performing in the Reich. For instance, in 1928 a group of Brown Shirts disrupted the performance of the opera *Jonny Spielt Auf* at the Munich Gärtner Platz Theatre with shouting, stink bombs, and tear gas for its representation of a black jazz artist.<sup>78</sup> National Socialists protested the American musical *Hallelujah* (1929) because of its all-Black cast.<sup>79</sup> Nazi censors agitated to have the movie *King Kong* banned in Germany because it involved a white woman falling into

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<sup>72</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Manheim translation, New York: Mariner Books Edition, 1999), 320.

<sup>73</sup> *Nordische Schönheit: Inr Wunschbild im Leben und in der Kunst* (Munich: J.F. Lehmann, 1937), reprinted in *The Third Reich Sourcebook* edited by Anson Rabinbach and Sander L. Gilman, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 244.

<sup>74</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Manheim translation, New York: Mariner Books Edition, 1999), 325.

<sup>75</sup> Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself*, 283.

<sup>76</sup> Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 192; Snyder, *Black Earth*, 16.

<sup>77</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Manheim translation, New York: Mariner Books Edition, 1999), 430.

<sup>78</sup> Niedermeyer, "'Jonny' Entfesselt Skandal in München," *Der Artist* 2221 (14 July 1928).

<sup>79</sup> Thomas Doherty, *Hollywood and Hitler, 1930-1939* (New York: Columbia Press, 2013), 8.

a hands of an ‘ape.’<sup>80</sup> In 1935, Julius Streicher, in his role of Gauleiter of Franconia, in response to reports that Wango, an African American wrestler visiting Germany, was defeating white opponents, banned him from the Reich.<sup>81</sup>

The most focused Nazi action against Black Germans came in 1937 with the forced sterilization of the ‘Rhineland bastards’ — mixed raced children born from occupying French African colonial troops and German women.<sup>82</sup> Racial logic also played a key role in the formulation of Nazi foreign policy. Instead of welcoming the Poles and Ukrainians as allies against the Bolsheviks, the Nazis considered them to be “niggers” to be looted and ruled.<sup>83</sup> Occupied Poles, in turn, compared themselves to ‘Negros’ in the book *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.<sup>84</sup> As a result of this racial logic, Hitler missed important opportunities to cultivate potential allies in Eastern Europe.

Mussolini’s feeling about race was far more sanguine than Hitler’s.<sup>85</sup> Mussolini’s use of racism was more utilitarian than ideological and he was not above deploying it in the service of the Fascist cause. During the post-World War I struggle for Italy’s Treaty of London promised territories, Mussolini depicted the Slavs as “primitive” and “savage.” Mussolini considered Fascism as the “advance sentry of Italian purity” that would serve as a shield against pan-Slavism. Mussolini not only considered Slavs congenitally less civilized than Italians but also ideological dangerous given their shared racial thread with the Russian Bolsheviks — so much so that Slavism and Bolshevism became conflated concepts among Italian fascists much like Jewish-Bolshevism would be

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<sup>80</sup> Ben Urwand, *The Collaboration: Hollywood’s Pact with Hitler* (Harvard University Press, 2013), 1-6.

<sup>81</sup> *New York Age*, March 16, 1935, 5.

<sup>82</sup> Burleigh and Wippermann, *The Racial State*, 130.

<sup>83</sup> Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe’s Twentieth Century* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 154.

<sup>84</sup> Tim Snyder, *Black Earth*, 18.

<sup>85</sup> In 1933 Mussolini stated, “Race! It is a feeling, not a reality: ninety-five percent, at least, is a feeling. Nothing will ever make me believe that biologically pure races can be shown to exist today. ... National pride has no need of the delirium of race.” In March 1933 he sent a personal message to Hitler to dissuade him from undertaking a racial campaign against the Jews: “I believe the problem is that the struggle against the Jews will not strengthen National Socialism internally but rather will increase the moral pressure and economic reprisals of world Jewry,” see Gene Bernardini, “The Origins and Development of Racial Anti-Semitism in Fascist Italy,” in *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (Sep., 1977), 431-453.



for the Nazis.<sup>86</sup> The presence of non-Italian minorities in the Upper Adriatic territories and their resistance to Italian nationalism fuelled Fascist violence and repression as they worked to ‘cleanse’ the newly won lands. Fascist activity in the Upper Adriatic helped define the movement; early Italian Fascists identified themselves by whom they fought against — namely socialists and Slavs — groups seen hostile to European culture and civilization. The Fascist regime also utilized racial logic to justify its Ethiopian conquest in 1935. Mussolini thought that Americans would be sympathetic with Italy’s war as a result of their own experiences with the “semi-barbarism” and “incurable immaturity” of Black people.<sup>87</sup>

Italy’s racial laws manifested first in its colonial domain. Miscegenation laws were established in the colonies shortly after the Italy’s 1935-36 conquest of Ethiopia. In April 1937, Royal Decree 880 prohibited sexual relations between Italians and Black locals in East Africa, except prostitutes.<sup>88</sup> While many Italians held black-skinned Africans to be biologically inferior, the purpose of these dictates were to facilitate Italian control of the colony by reducing fraternization.<sup>89</sup> Subsequent regulations enacted by the Fascist state restricting sexual and other contacts between Italians and Ethiopians were enacted with the purpose of formally establishing a racial hierarchy that unquestionably placed Italians at the top.<sup>90</sup>

Anti-Jewish and anti-Black policies arrived in Italy proper in 1938. The harbinger of racial legislation to the Italian mainland was the July 1938 publication of the *Italian Manifesto of Race (Manifesto della razza)* formulated by a group of scientists convened by the Fascist government. It stated, “it is time for Italians to frankly proclaim themselves racists,” and was intended to serve as an ideological foundation for soon to be promulgated racist laws. Key points of the Manifesto were that ‘race’ was biological,

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<sup>86</sup> Marco Bresciani, “The Post-Imperial Space of the Upper Adriatic and the Post-War Ascent of Fascism” (In *Interdisciplinary Polish Studies/Akteure Der Neuordnung Ostmitteleuropa Und Das Erbe Der Imperien, 1917 - 1924*. Editors Grelka, Frank, and Tim Buchen, Berlin: Epubli, 2017), 56 - 62

<sup>87</sup> Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*, 289.

<sup>88</sup> E.M. Robertson, “Race as a Factor in Mussolini’s Policy in Africa and Europe,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Jan., 1988), 51.

<sup>89</sup> Bernardini, “The Origins and Development of Racial Anti-Semitism in Fascist Italy,” 442.

<sup>90</sup> Mazower, *Dark Continent*, 72.

Italians were of the Aryan race, and Jews were not Italians.<sup>91</sup> Later that year, a series of associated racial laws were passed that prohibited Black and Jewish people from marrying ethnic Italians. Jews were banned from the Fascist Party and from serving as civil servants. Jewish Italian students were segregated to Jewish schools and foreign Jews were expelled from the country.<sup>92</sup> Jews were banned from serving in the Italian armed forces and blocked from any profession other than small business or agriculture.

The restrictions were extended in 1939 with Law No. 1004 which outlawed sexual relations between ‘Aryan’ Italians and individuals of ‘inferior’ races, with punishment up to five years in jail.<sup>93</sup> The harshness of these edicts was mitigated to some extent by exemptions that could be granted by the state to Jews who were considered to have served the nation and Fascism.<sup>94</sup> Nazi newspapers celebrated the establishment of Italy’s these provisions and referred to them as the “Nuremberg Laws of (Italian) Fascism” due to their perceived similarity to Germany’s racial laws.<sup>95</sup> Other restrictions adopted in 1939 and 1940 were intended to further weaken Jewish economic power by revoking permits for shopkeepers and required Jews to sell their businesses and financial assets to ‘Aryans’.<sup>96</sup> By all indications, Mussolini changed his stance on Jews in the late 1930s as a result of the international condemnation heaped upon Italy by Jewish writers for its invasion of Ethiopia, as well as Italy’s increasingly closer relationship with Nazi Germany. There was also a feeling among Fascists that the mobilizing powers of racism could help reignite the passion of the early days of the movement. Even so, widespread

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<sup>91</sup> “Fascism and the Problems of Race,” *Il Giornale d'Italia*, July 14, 1938.

<sup>92</sup> R. J. B. Bosworth, *Life under the Dictatorship, 1915-1945* (Penguin Books, 2007), 420; *Haaretz*, “1938: Fascist Italy Announces Its First anti-Jewish Laws,” September 1, 2014.

<sup>93</sup> Davide Rodogno, *Fascism's European Empire: Italian Occupation During the Second World War*, (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 65.

<sup>94</sup> R. J. B. Bosworth, *Mussolini* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), 277. Generally speaking, exceptions applied to economic rules but not socially segregating rules. “An exempt person and his family were thus still effectively treated as non-Italians and physically separated from the remainder of the population, even if they temporarily retained some economic rights. Indeed, even employment in most public or quasi-public entities was forbidden to them, although exceptions were later provided regarding law and other professions,” see M. Livingston, *The Fascists and the Jews of Italy: Mussolini's Race Laws, 1938–1943* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 64.

<sup>95</sup> *Trenton Evening Times*, Oct 07, 1938, 2.

<sup>96</sup> *New York Times*, “Scholars Reconsidering Italy’s Treatment of Jews in the Nazi Era,” November 4, 2010.

persecution and deportation of Italian Jews to deathcamps did not begin until the establishment of the Salò Republic in 1943 when Mussolini was under the power of the Nazis.

How did the United States and the South in particular compare with the Italians and Nazi fascist states when it came to racist legislation? Anti-Semitism and anti-Black sentiment were widespread throughout the United States during the interwar period, with most white Americans repelled by the idea of living next to or marrying a Jew or African American.<sup>97</sup> Fifty-eight percent of Americans indicated in a 1938 poll that Jews were entirely or at least partially responsible for Hitler's actions against them.<sup>98</sup> James Weldon Johnson, the first Black executive secretary of the NAACP, described the pervasive narrative many white Americans held of blacks as, "lazy, shiftless, unreliable...an unreliable child...he is incapable of mental and moral development...he is a brutal and degenerate criminal."<sup>99</sup> Walter White who succeeded Johnson, commented that anti-Black racism was as bad in the North as the South.<sup>100</sup> What *was* different about the South compared to the rest of the country and what earned it the special opprobrium of liberal critics, was its legislative segregation (Jim Crow laws) and tolerance for vigilante lynching.<sup>101</sup> African American author, Robert Kerlin, painted a picture of what was life was like for southern Blacks under the South's racial strictures in his book *Voice of the Negro* (1919). Kerlin shared, "Any Negro who says he is satisfied to be alone with his broken political power, his miserable Jim Crow restrictions, his un-American segregation, his pinched and emasculated democracy, and his blood-curdling inquisition of lynching simply lies."<sup>102</sup> The belief in the intellectual and social inferiority of African

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<sup>97</sup> Cantril, *Public Opinion*, 447.

<sup>98</sup> Rita Simon, *Public Opinion in America, 1936-1970* (Chicago: Rand McNally College Publishing, 1974), 94.

<sup>99</sup> Illustratively, President Roosevelt did not publicly acknowledge or invite to the White House any of the African Americans, including Jesse Owens who won four gold medals, who competed at the Berlin Olympics. Only white Olympians were invited to the White House in 1936, see James Weldon Johnson, *Negro Americans, What Now?* (NY: Viking Press, 1938), 91.

<sup>100</sup> Walter White, *A Man Called White* (New York: Stratford Press, 1948), 45, 226.

<sup>101</sup> George Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971* (New York: Random House, 1972), 142.

<sup>102</sup> Robert Kerlin, *Voice of the Negro* (New York: Dutton & Co., 1919), 28.

Americans was the foundational tenet that informed the logic of segregation, and the resulting economic and political gains it provided for the southern elite cemented it within the South's social structures.<sup>103</sup> Even though they were repressed and treated as second class citizens in this environment, most Black southerners responded in a quiescent manner prior to World War I — a fact that validated the system and the idea of black inferiority in the minds of many white southerners.<sup>104</sup>

Unlike in Italy and Germany where racial legislation was impelled through national legislation, in the South it was architected through a series of state and local ordinances. To avoid the tedious repetition of a state-by-state investigation across the South, the experience of Jim Crow in Virginia is expatiated as a representative example. Virginia instituted state-wide segregation laws between 1900 and 1944, with the most far reaching provisions added during the interwar period.<sup>105</sup> Most Black and about half of poor white voters were effectively disenfranchised through changes to the state constitution of 1902 through a new system of literacy requirements along with poll taxes.<sup>106</sup> The first segregationist law required separate but equal seating on railcars and steamboats and was expanded six years later in 1906 later to include streetcars.<sup>107</sup> Thereafter, in 1912 residential segregation was mandated by state law. Even though ruled unconstitutional multiple times by the Supreme Court, Virginia kept the statute on its books until 1950.<sup>108</sup> Prisoners in state penitentiaries were segregated in 1918. Starting in the 1920s, the Anglo-Saxon Club founded in Richmond, Virginia began lobbying for a vigorous expansion of Virginia's racial state. The Club's thirty-one active local branches

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<sup>103</sup> William Percy, in his autobiographical paean to the Old South wrote that blacks are “without moral stamina, without discipline, without standards” and are “condemned genetically to inferiority, laziness, irresponsibility, and criminality.” see William Percy, *Lanterns on the Levee* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1941), 306.

<sup>104</sup> Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 16.

<sup>105</sup> Charles Wynes, “The Evolution of Jim Crow Laws in Twentieth Century Virginia,” *Phylon* 28, no. 4 (1967), 416.

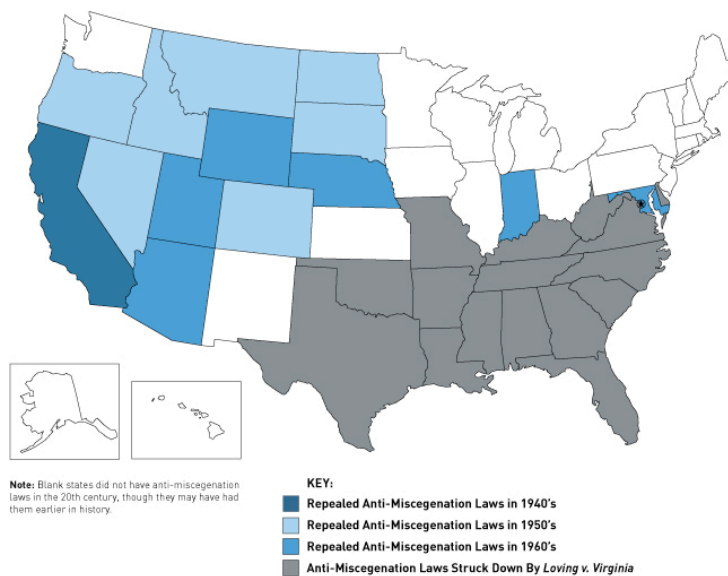
<sup>106</sup> Ronald Heinemann, *Old Dominion, New Commonwealth: A History of Virginia, 1607-2007* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 277.

<sup>107</sup> June Purcell Guild, *Black Laws of Virginia: A Summary of the Legislative Acts of Virginia Concerning Negroes from Earliest Times to the Present* (New York: Negro University Press, 1936), 144-147.

<sup>108</sup> Wynes, “The Evolution of Jim Crow Laws in Twentieth Century Virginia,” 418.

supported both Virginia’s Racial Integrity Act, which prohibited marriage between any white and non-white person, and the Massenburg Bill which legislated segregation in all places of public assembly.<sup>109</sup> The anti-miscegenation bill became law in 1924 and the wide sweeping segregation bill became law in 1926. Additional segregationist legislation continued to be passed through 1944. Jim Crow laws continued to define the South’s racial state until the system was undermined by the Supreme Court’s 1954 ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the twenty-first Amendment that outlawed poll taxes. Anti-miscegenation laws survived a bit longer in the South but were eventually declared unconstitutional in *Loving v. Virginia* in 1967 (Figure 1).

**Figure 4: Anti-Miscegenation Laws by State**



Source: American Civil Liberties Union<sup>110</sup>

Another point of similarity between the South and Germany was the mutual desire from politicians of both states to cleanse themselves of ‘troublesome’ minorities. Prior to the ‘Final Solution,’ the Nazis endeavoured at first to expel German Jews by encouraging them to leave through harassment. With the start of the war, harsher measures were

<sup>109</sup> Guild, *Black Laws of Virginia*, 148-149.

<sup>110</sup> American Civil Liberties Union, <https://www.aclu.org/other/map-leadup-loving>

enacted that forcibly expelled Jews across Soviet lines in Poland. When this was no longer feasible, seriously consideration was given to banishing Jews to the island of Madagascar. In the South, rather than live with increasingly discontented African Americans, Senator Bilbo from Mississippi sponsored legislation to ship Black Americans back to Africa. His plan was reminiscent of the nineteenth century American Society's program that repatriated freed slaves back to Africa that resulted in the founding of Liberia.

The South and the European fascist states differentiated themselves from the wider pervasive background racism of the interwar period by the degree by which they employed intrusive legislation to exert social, political, and economic control over their 'troublesome' minorities. While Britain and Australia might have blocked immigrants based on race, the Germans and Italians deprived Jews of political and economic liberty. While California might have outlawed miscegenation, in the South a Black man could be beaten because he looked a white woman in the eye. In the South it was considered good fun to portray oneself as a 'southern planter' to outsiders — idealizing a lifestyle built directly on the unpaid labour of Black people who were treated as property.<sup>111</sup> Drawing upon the southern example, the Germans and Italians eventually legislated Jim Crow segregationist systems on par with the South.

#### **4.3.2. Anti-Semitism**

Given the second-class status of African Americans, one might suppose that Jews were also targeted for persecution in the South as they were in fascist Europe. Anti-Semitism, energized by the concept of Jewish-Bolshevism, was in fact widespread during the interwar period throughout the United States like many parts of Europe. Even President Wilson argued in 1918, "the Bolshevist movement had been led by Jews."<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Dr. Luther Courtney tells a story involving Roy Hatch (a mortician) and himself (a college professor). [In 1937] They went to a Rotary Convention in Atlantic City and Hatch registered himself as a "Southern Planter." They thought it sounded more interesting that way, see *Internal History of the Waco Rotary Club*, c.1955, Rotary Collection, Boxes Uncategorized, Mayborn Museum at Baylor University.

<sup>112</sup> Richard Frankel, "An Exceptional Hatred?: Re-Examining Antisemitism in Germany and the United States in a Time of War and Upheaval, 1914-1923," *Antisemitism Studies* 3, no. 2 (Fall, 2019): 212.

Stereotypes of Jews as dirty, conniving, greedy outsiders also were widely accepted. In *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald portrayed the book's one Jewish character, Meyer Wolfsheim, as an unscrupulous "flat-nosed Jew."<sup>113</sup> Hugh Gibson, an American diplomat in Eastern Europe described Jewish villages as worse than "nigger villages at home."<sup>114</sup> Perhaps most famously, in 1939 President Roosevelt denied permission for the *St. Louis*, a passenger ship filled with Jewish refugees, to make port in America forcing it to return to Europe where about half of the passengers became victims of the Holocaust.

Given this backdrop and southerners' intolerance for African American rights, it might be supposed that the worst anti-Semitism in the country was to be found in the South. In fact, this was not the case. Southern Jews were able to avoid systemic persecution for a number of reasons. First, there were relatively few Jews in the South — only about five percent of American Jews lived in the South, and these tended to be long established as the region was generally not an attractive destination for newly arrived immigrant Jews.<sup>115</sup> Southern Jews worked to assimilate into southern society: they were part of the business community, held office, and attended white schools. For example, the Waco, Texas Rotary Club — the leading business organization in a predominately white town — included a Jew, Nat Tanenbaum, on the Board of Directors from 1924-1928, while during the same period it hosted no Black, Asian, or Hispanic members.<sup>116</sup> Even so, given the importance of Protestant religion in the social life of most southerners, Jews were socially segregated to some extent by virtue of their religion. There were social barriers to intermarriage between non-Jews and practicing Jews because of religion, but this could be mitigated if a Jewish person embraced Protestant Christianity.<sup>117</sup> Nat Tanenbaum followed this prescription to the tee. Born in New York to a Jewish family, Tanenbaum's acceptance into the larger southern social community was facilitated by his

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<sup>113</sup> F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (Seattle: Amazon Publishing [1925] 2021), 44.

<sup>114</sup> Frankel, "An Exceptional Hatred?" 209-230.

<sup>115</sup> "Statistics of the Jews – 1929," in *American Jewish Year Book Vol. 32 (1930-1931)*, edited by Harry Schneiderman (American Jewish Committee), 220.

<sup>116</sup> Leadership and Membership Records from 1922 to 1941, Rotary Collection, Boxes Uncategorized, Mayborn Museum at Baylor University.

<sup>117</sup> It is worth noting that similar limitations to greater or lesser degree also applied to other non-Protestant groups, such as Catholics, in the many parts of the South.

conversion to Christianity (Presbyterianism) before marrying his first wife.<sup>118</sup> Able to prosper and live relatively un-harassed, southern Jews tended to be strong supporters of southern social structures. Many antebellum Jews supported the institution of slavery and were indistinguishable from the general white population in terms of their attitude and treatment of African Americans.<sup>119</sup> Much of the southern Jewish community supported secession from the Union and provided significant contributions by way of monetary support and military and government service.<sup>120</sup> A number of Jews even were members of the Ku Klux Klan that formed during Reconstruction.<sup>121</sup> Woodrow Wilson, the first southern president since the Civil War and an arch-segregationist, appointed the first Jew to the U.S. Supreme Court, Louis D. Brandeis, a fellow southerner, in 1916.<sup>122</sup>

These attitudes carried over to the interwar period. Southern Jews actively condemned and discouraged the actions of ‘outsider’ northern Jews who visited the South to agitate against southern political, labour, and racial traditions. In turn, they were criticized by their northern counterparts. For instance, northern rabbi Philip Bernstein complained in 1936 that southern Jews, “in their languid drawls, their intense southern patriotism, their contempt for ‘nigger lovers’ are...obviously a product of their environment.”<sup>123</sup> Some more charitably attributed the behaviour of southern Jews as an act of self-preservation. As one Mississippi Jew put it, “We have to play ball. Anti-Semitism is always right around the corner...we don't want our temple bombed.”<sup>124</sup> Leo Frank, the first Jew lynched in America, for the alleged rape and murder of a young white

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<sup>118</sup> Obituary, *Waco Tribune-Herald*, Oct. 2, 1946.

<sup>119</sup> Clive Webb, *Fight Against Fear: Southern Jews and Black Civil Rights* (University of Georgia Press, 2001), 2.

<sup>120</sup> Robert Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 12.

<sup>121</sup> Clive Webb, *Fight Against Fear: Southern Jews and Black Civil Rights* (University of Georgia Press, 2001), 13.

<sup>122</sup> Wilson once stated, “the only place in the world where nothing has to be explained to me is the South,” see Arthur Link, “Woodrow Wilson: The American as Southerner,” *The Journal of Southern History* Vol. 36, No. 1 (Feb., 1970): 3-17.

<sup>123</sup> Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 13-15.

<sup>124</sup> Jack Salzman, *Struggles in the Promised Land: Towards a History of Black-Jewish Relations in the United States* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 281.



girl in Georgia in 1915, served as stark memory for southern Jews to mind their place.<sup>125</sup> By supporting the prevailing racial morés of the South's racial state, southern Jews were able to avoid the type of anti-Semitism experienced in Europe and other areas of the United States.<sup>126</sup>

### 4.3.3. Extra-Judicial Violence

The prevalence of extra-judicial or vigilante violence against minorities and communists was another common denominator between the South and fascist Europe. In the South, lynching was used to enforce the region's racial hierarchy of white superiority. It was both murder and public spectacle — meant to simultaneously serve as punishment for the offender and to instil terror in the wider black community. With his usual irony, W.J. Cash described lynching as a community ritual, “an act of racial and patriotic expression, an act of chivalry.”<sup>127</sup> Lynching not only included the hanging of African Americans, but sometimes also the torture and burning of them as well. It was not uncommon for lynchings to be publicized in advance in order to attract a large crowd including women and children. For instance, in January 1921, both the *Memphis News Scimitar* and *Memphis Press* gave advance notice of a lynching to its readers.<sup>128</sup> For the 1934 lynching of Claude Neal in Florida, the lynching party had been planned and publicized and thousands of people attended. The mob tortured Neal all day and made him eat his own his penis and testicles before he died.<sup>129</sup> His corpse was hung from a tree in the courthouse square where spectators could take a picture with it for fifty cents.<sup>130</sup>

Lynching in conjunction with Jim Crow was meant to exert power and control over the region's Black population in order to keep it subservient to white dominance.

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<sup>125</sup> Jewish Virtual Library, *Leo Frank: 1884 – 1915*.

<sup>126</sup> Howard Rabinowitz, "Nativism, Bigotry and Anti-Semitism in the South," *American Jewish History* 77, no. 3 (1988): 437-51.

<sup>127</sup> W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Vintage Books, [1941] 1991), 118.

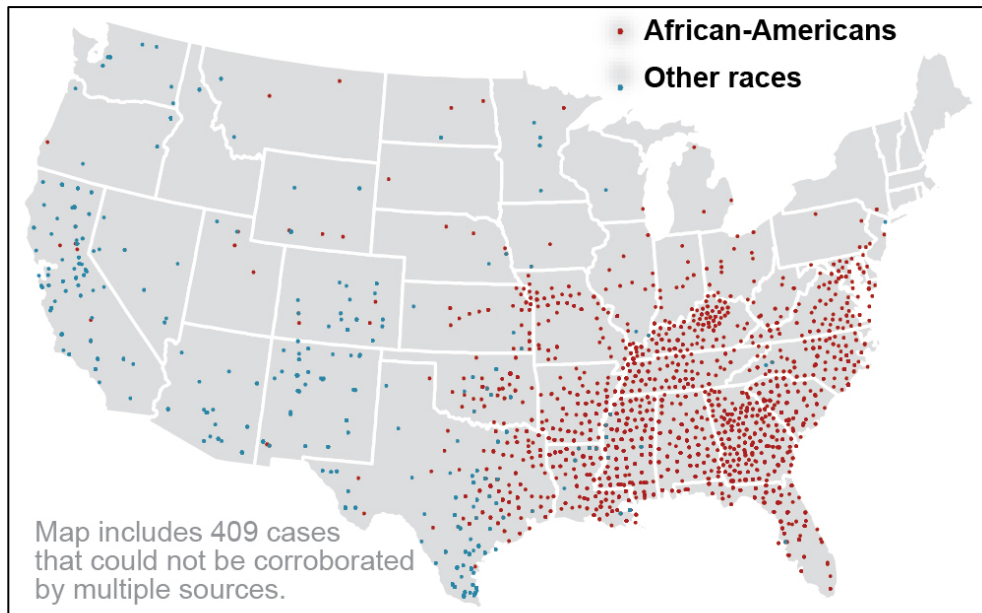
<sup>128</sup> *Labor Defender*, September 1929 Volume 4, No. 9.

<sup>129</sup> Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 197.

<sup>130</sup> Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself*, 167.

There were 3,446 African Americans lynched in the United States between 1882 – 1968, with the vast majority occurring before 1940.<sup>131</sup> African Americans were lynched almost exclusively (95%) in the South.<sup>132</sup> This shocking percentage however must be considered within the context of the country's demographics: greater than 90% of Black Americans lived in the South in the nineteenth century, 89 percent by 1910 and 85.2 percent by 1920.<sup>133</sup> The map below, illustrates the regional pattern of lynching. Each dot indicates a county where a victim was killed by mobs from 1835 to 1964. Some dots represent multiple victims.<sup>134</sup>

**Figure 5: Geographic Distribution of Lynching (1853 to 1964)**



Source: Tuskegee Institute Archives

Southerners first and foremost claimed they needed the act of lynching to protect the virtue and purity of white women from the brutal sexuality of black men – especially in the case of rape. Southern writer, William Percy, considered the untouchability of

<sup>131</sup> Tuskegee Institute Archives, <http://archive.tuskegee.edu/archive/handle/123456789/983>

<sup>132</sup> James W. Clarke, "Without Fear or Shame: Lynching, Capital Punishment and the Subculture of Violence in the American South." *British Journal of Political Science* 28, no. 2 (1998): 282.

<sup>133</sup> Tindall, *The Emergence of the South*, 148.

<sup>134</sup> Tuskegee University, Tuskegee Institute Archives.

white women by black men the South's one sacred taboo.<sup>135</sup> W.J. Cash identified this as the South's 'rape complex' which he viewed as an aspect of southern masculinity. U.S. Senator James Byrnes from South Carolina stated in Congress, "rape is responsible, directly and indirectly for most of the lynching in America."<sup>136</sup> Rebutting this claim, the Tuskegee Institute estimated that only twenty-five percent of lynchings were related to rape. Approximately twenty-one African Americans were lynched on average per year during the interwar period in the United States, with the highest levels occurring during the post-World War I racial turmoil and trending down thereafter. In many instances, lynchings were not prosecuted as the southern justice system and society tacitly condoned their actions.<sup>137</sup>

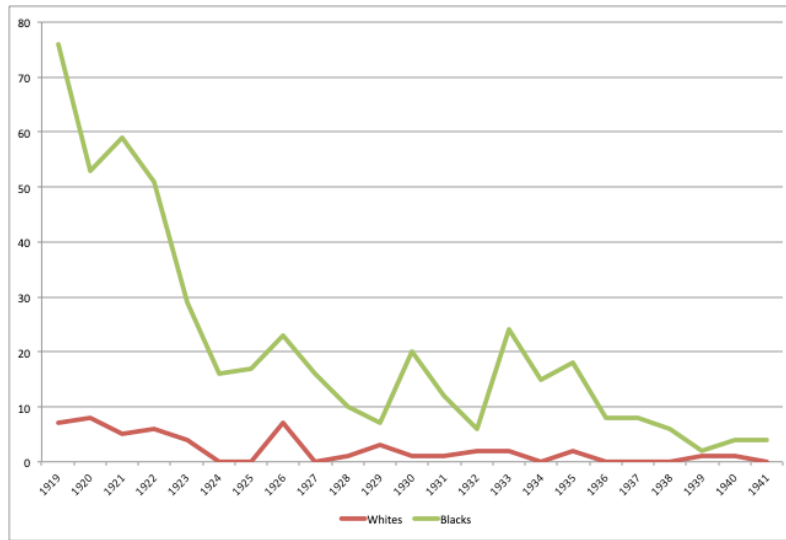
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<sup>135</sup> Brinkmeyer, *The Fourth Ghost*, 116.

<sup>136</sup> A number of quantitative studies by the NAACP and other organizations attempted to dispel the rape myth — the notion that lynching was most often related to sexual crimes. One study sponsored by the Mississippi State Bar Association in 1925 revealed that violence between black and white men was the first reason for lynching with sexual assault on white women was second. Even for consensual interracial relations, the penalty to the black man could be hanging, and the white woman would be flogged. The number of lynchings steadily decreased year-by-year as the twentieth century progressed, except for a short-term spike in the wake of the First War, see Tindall, *The Emergence of the South*, 170-173.

<sup>137</sup> "Three-Fourths of Lynchings for Crimes Other than Rape," Monroe N. Work, Director Department of Records and Research at the Tuskegee Institute, to Hatton Sumners, 1937, box 71, Folder 4.3, Dallas Historical Society's Hatton W. Sumners Collection (hereafter described as HWS Papers); Tuskegee Institute Archives.

**Figure 6:  
Lynchings per Year in the United States (1919-1941)**



Source: Tuskegee Institute Archives

On the surface, extra-judicial killing in fascist Europe appeared different as it was generally targeted against the regimes' political enemies and was not used specifically for racial persecution (at least up to the *Kristallnacht*). However, this is a false dichotomy as racial and political threats were often intertwined in the South and fascist states. When African American support of the Populist movement in the late nineteenth century threatened the dominance of the Democratic Party in the South (and hence the racial order), black-belt whites (whites living in majority Black areas) were roused to action and used their influence to convince the wider southern society to enact voting and social restrictions.<sup>138</sup> In Germany, a key contention of the Nazis was that Jews played an outsized role in the development and spread of the Bolshevism. This claim of Jewish-Bolshevism was fundamental to the Nazis' response to the 'Jewish question.'<sup>139</sup> A similar dynamic existed in Italy where the Slavs were associated with Bolshevism.<sup>140</sup>

<sup>138</sup> Key, *Southern Politics*, 8.

<sup>139</sup> The directive to kill Bolshevik functionaries upon capture was transmitted to the Ostheer and SS in the Commissar Order, and from there it was not a far leap of inductive logic to a general policy of more widely killing Jews. According to Nazi thinking, the death struggle with the Soviet Union required a 'Final Solution' for the Jews in order to decapitate the Bolshevik movement and to hasten German military victory.

<sup>140</sup> Bresciani, "The Post-Imperial Space," 54.

Influenced by the writings of French thinker Georges Sorel who favoured violence and direct action as a means to creating a new order, the Italian Fascists were without a doubt aggressive street fighters and purveyors of violence.<sup>141</sup> Between 1920-1922 Mussolini's Black Shirts killed several thousand and wounded tens of thousands with squad violence, or *squadristo*.<sup>142</sup> Murder, beatings, and destruction of property were all part of the Black Shirts' repertoire. For instance, in 1922 the *squadristi* subdued a group of anti-fascists in Turin leaving eleven dead. *Squadristo* was responsible for the kidnapping and murder of prominent anti-Fascist politician Giacomo Matteotti in 1924, and several prominent and anti-fascist journalists in 1926. After he seized the reins of state through dictatorship, Mussolini strove to repress *squadristo*. By the end of 1926, Mussolini had successfully stripped local Fascists of their ability to murder and terrorize their enemies.<sup>143</sup> To Mussolini, everything, especially the use of violence, must be left to the Fascist state.<sup>144</sup>

Before the *Kristallnacht* it was uncommon in Germany for Jews to be murdered by mob violence. The majority of violence against Jews in the early years of the Nazi regime was property related: windows were smashed, businesses were tagged with graffiti, graveyards desecrated, and houses robbed. Physical violence took the form of beatings and humiliations such as forced beard cuttings, head shavings, and being spit upon.<sup>145</sup> In 1935, addressing a crowd of 25,000 Nazis in Berlin's Sportpalast, Julius Streicher contrasted Nazi Germany with the South when he claimed that more Blacks were lynched in the U.S. than Jews killed in Germany by mob violence. The Nazi Party

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<sup>141</sup> "Revolutionary syndicalism keeps alive the desire to strike in the masses and only prospers when important strikes, accompanied by violence, take place," see Sorel, *Reflections on Violence* (New York: B.W. Huebsch [1908], 1914), 39-43.

<sup>142</sup> Michael Ebner, *Ordinary Violence in Mussolini's Italy* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 9.

<sup>143</sup> Ebner, *Ordinary Violence in Mussolini's Italy*, 23.

<sup>144</sup> Along with targeted, or "surgical violence," the Fascist state's punishment of choice was *confino* under which some fifteen thousand political prisoners were exiled to islands and southern Italian villages. *Confino* was not used to pursue a racial agenda, but rather to clear Italy of anti-fascists, Jehovah Witnesses, homosexuals, and Mafioso, see Ebner, *Ordinary Violence in Mussolini's Italy* 2, 12.

<sup>145</sup> Armin Nolzen, "The Nazi Party and its Violence Against the Jews, 1933-1939: Violence as a Historiographical Concept," *Yad Vashem Studies*, XXXI, Jerusalem 2003, 244-286.

accepted Jews being humiliated, beaten and robbed, but frowned upon the disorderliness of lynch mobs and extra-judicial killings within Germany.<sup>146</sup>

The Brown Shirts, or SA, utilized a network of ‘wild’ concentration camps where they beat and tortured their ideological foes, but only rarely killed them.<sup>147</sup> Representative Celler, a Jewish member of the United States Congress and harsh critic of Nazi Germany confirmed this state of affairs, commenting, “He may not be murdering the Jews, but he is undoubtedly killing them economically and starving them into submission.”<sup>148</sup> Of course there were exceptions. For instance, on March 15, 1933 a Jewish businessman was shot by an unidentified member of the SA.<sup>149</sup> While Jews experienced violence before 1938, this mostly often did not result in murder and the number of killings were on par with the number of lynchings in the South during the same time period. However, this changed with the *Kristallnacht*. During the forty-eight hours of state sanctioned violence, ninety-one Jews were killed, more than 1,000 synagogues were burned, and approximately 7,500 Jewish businesses were trashed and looted. Approximately six hundred terrified Jews committed suicide. Afterwards, around thirty thousand Jewish men between the ages of sixteen and sixty were arrested and put in ‘protective custody’ at Dachau, Buchenwald, and Sachsenhausen.<sup>150</sup>

While it is not uncommon to find instances of extra-judicial violence in a plethora of modern and pre-modern societies, the affinity between the violence in the South and fascist Europe was distinct by the manner in which it was condoned to protect the prevailing cultural order. The beatings and killings were perceived as enriching, instead

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<sup>146</sup> Jonathan Wiesen, “American Lynching in the Nazi Imagination: Race and Extra-Legal Violence in 1930s Germany,” *Germany History* Vol. 36, No. 1, 38-59.

<sup>147</sup> Burleigh and Wippermann, *The Racial State*, 77.

<sup>148</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record* Volume 77 Part 2 (1933), 2019; *The New York Evening Post* reported in June 1933, “An indeterminate number of Jews have been killed. Hundreds of Jews have been beaten and tortured,” see U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record* Volume 77 Part 6 (1933), 5929.

<sup>149</sup> Nolzen, “The Nazi Party and its Violence Against the Jews, 1933-1939,” 244.

<sup>150</sup> The official Nazi count at the time was 36 Jews killed and 195 synagogues destroyed, see “For Germany's Jews, the Night Hope Died,” *New York Times*, November 8, 1988, 1,10; Lionel Kochan and Michael Berenbaum, “Kristallnacht,” in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., Vol. 12. edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (Detroit: Macmillan Reference, 2007), 362-363; Goring in his diary wrote that he tried to protect some of the synagogues but failed, see Nolzen.

of supplanting, the judicial system by providing a resolution for offenses against culture and race that were too horrific to be dealt with according to the rules of a liberal society. The sexual violation of a white woman by a Black man, the pollution of the *Herrenvolk* by Jews, and anarchistic occupation of private property were acts deemed too evil to deserve a trial. Violence proved to be an effective tactic to intimidate minorities and communists and silencing those who would succour them. Vigilante violence was accepted, and sometimes encouraged, as a means for advancing the interests of the elites and protecting traditional social structures. Vigilantes were emboldened by the acquiescence of the state and their fellow citizens. Unpunished, this violence represented a violation of the social contract; a condition fundamentally hostile to a healthy liberal state.

#### 4.3.4. Transnational Exchanges

Even though American, Italian, and German racists differed in who they prioritized for racial oppression, this community exchanged ideas as part of a global network of white supremacy. European fascists drew inspiration from America, especially the South, and in turn fired the imagination of racists in the United States. There was a considerable exchange of ideas between American and Nazi eugenicists in the 1920-30s. Hitler corresponded with the influential eugenicist Madison Grant, praising Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race* bestseller as his "bible."<sup>151</sup> It was the first American book the Nazi press translated into German and published.<sup>152</sup> Senior Nazi legal theorists wrote admiringly about U.S. immigration and racial law in publications such as *The National socialist Handbook for Law and Legislation* (1935) and *Race Law in the United States* (1936) by Heinrich Krieger.<sup>153</sup> In meetings and correspondence leading up to the Nuremberg Laws, there were significant discussions involving America's racial

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<sup>151</sup> Spiro, *Defending the Master Race*, 356.

<sup>152</sup> Eve Darian-Smith, "Re-reading W. E. B. Du Bois: the global dimensions of the US civil rights struggle," *Journal of Global History*, Volume 7, Issue 3 (November 2012): 487.

<sup>153</sup> *The National socialist Handbook for Law and Legislation* was edited by Hans Frank, who was at the time the head of the Party Office for Legal Affairs; James Q. Whitman, *Hitler's American Model* (Princeton University Press, 2017), 53-57.

laws. Hitler stated to a *New York Times* interviewer, “It was America, in spite of its enormous territory, that was the first country to teach us...that a nation should not open its doors equally to all races.”<sup>154</sup> Franz Gürtner, the Reich Minister of Justice, declared in a 1934 planning meeting for the Nuremberg Laws, “the United States provided the only model the Justice Ministry found to exploit.”<sup>155</sup>

While the Nazis admired America’s federal immigration laws, the South held a special place in their imagination. Hitler, expressed his admiration for the region saying:

Since the Civil War, in which the Southern states were conquered against all historical logic and sound sense, the Americans have been in a condition of political [and racial] decay. In that war, it was not the Southern States, but the American people themselves who were conquered...The principles of a great new social order based on principles of slavery and inequality were destroyed in that war, and with them the embryo of a future truly great America...<sup>156</sup>

Hitler also admired the South’s practice of lynching African Americans, saying “the existence of popular justice [lynching]...is assurance that the sound elements of the United States will one day awaken as they have awakened in Germany.” His affinity for Southern culture extended to motion pictures. *Gone with the Wind* was reportedly one of his favourite movies. The book was one of the biggest best sellers in the Third Reich, with German reviewers praising the story for its presentation of the Old South’s hierarchical black-white race relations.<sup>157</sup> Joseph Goebbels, the head of propaganda for the Nazi Party, held a viewing of the film for a group of friends the night before Operation Barbarossa commenced.<sup>158</sup>

Hitler’s admiration of the South was shared by the Nazi journalists and authors. In 1928, the official Nazi newspaper, *Volkischer Beobachter*, explained that the “uncultured democratic-capitalistic North had suppressed the brave and highly cultured large estates

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<sup>154</sup> *New York Times*, “Herr Hitler Replies to Some Fundamental Questions,” December 20, 1931, XX, 5.

<sup>155</sup> Whitman, *Hitler’s American Model*, 78.

<sup>156</sup> Hermann Rauschnig, *Voices of Destruction* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1940), 68-69.

<sup>157</sup> John Haag, “Gone With the Wind in Nazi Germany,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 73, No. 2 (Summer 1989): 291 - 294.

<sup>158</sup> Peter Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 182.



of the South.” The paper also wrote favourably about the South’s lynching of Black men as a means to protect the sexual purity of white women.<sup>159</sup> The Nazi journal *Nationalsozialistische Monatsheft* sympathized with the plight of white southerners and defended the “sheer necessity [that] compels the white race to act in an abhorrent and perhaps even cruel manner against the Negroes,” and approvingly quoted a Nazi official that “the only way to keep Negroes in their place is to lynch them.”<sup>160</sup> In 1935, Nazi author Deitrich Zwicker wrote an admiringly about the racial philosophy of John C. Calhoun, the vehemently pro-slavery politician from South Carolina, with an emphasis on drawing parallels between southern and Nazi racial ideology.<sup>161</sup> A 1936 article in *Neues Volk* approvingly noted the steps America was taking in regard to racial hygiene, with special accolades for the South. The article included a map of the United States that favourably highlighted the racial restrictions in place for each state. Most of the southern states were categorized as, “no right to vote, ban on marriages with white women, racial segregation (Figure 7).”<sup>162</sup>

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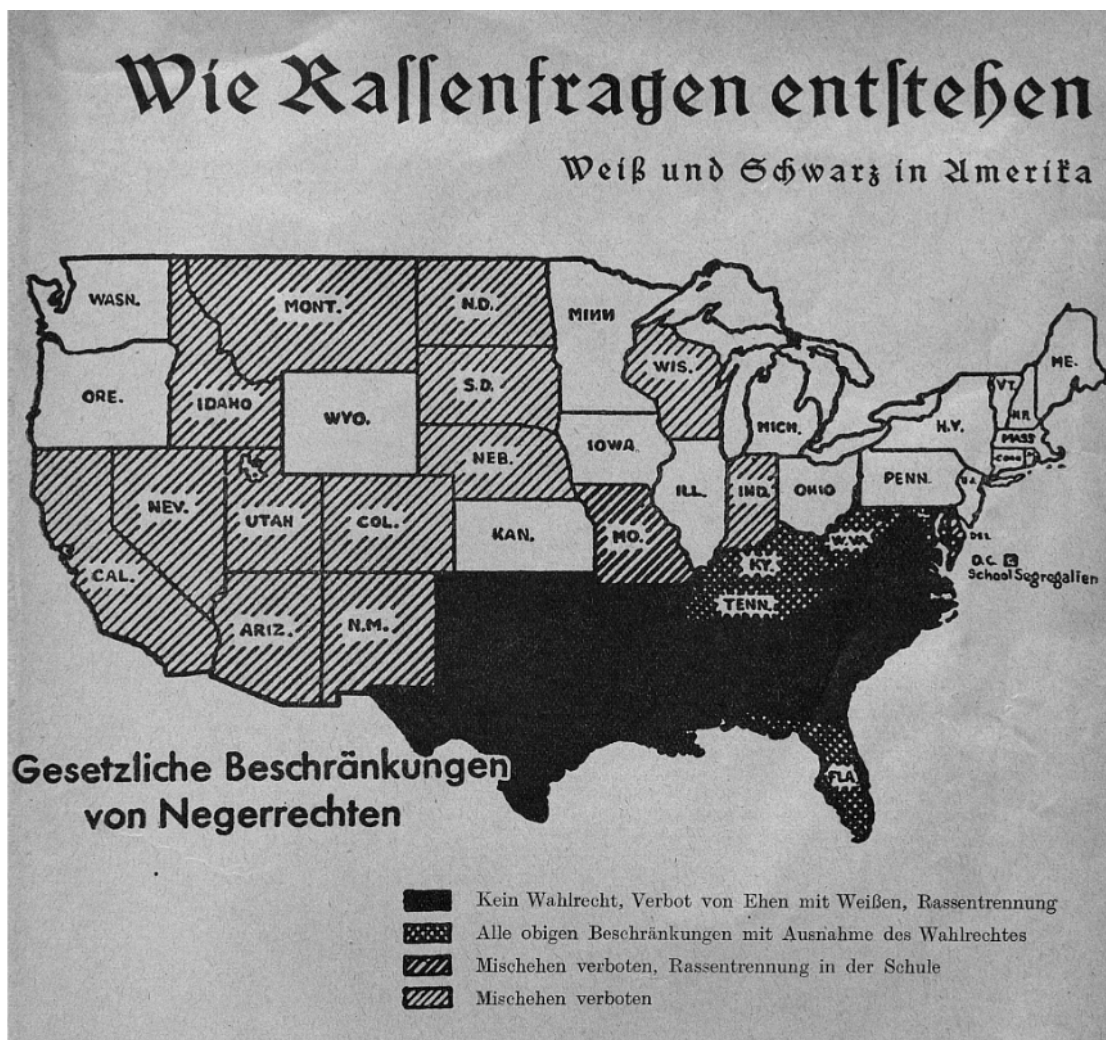
<sup>159</sup> Grill and Jenkins. "The Nazis and the American South in the 1930s: A Mirror Image?," 668, 674.

<sup>160</sup> A. Ward, “What Fascism Means to Negroes,” *The Washington Tribune*, April 21, 1933; “Editorial: Fascist Terror Against Negroes in Germany,” *The Negro Worker* vol. 3, no. 4-5 (Apr-May 1933): 1-3.

<sup>161</sup> Shearer Davis Bowman, *Masters & Lords: Mid-19th-Century U.S. Planters and Prussian Junkers* (Oxford University Press, 1993), 94

<sup>162</sup> *Neues Volk, Blatter des Rassenpolitischen Amtes der NSDAP* 4, no 3 (1936); Whitman, *Hitler’s American Model*, 61.

Figure 7: *Neues Volk*: Black and White Issues in America



Source: *Neues Volk*, Blatter des Rassenpolitischen Amtes der NSDAP 4, no. 3 (1936).

Nazi lawyers and legislators used the South’s racial provisions as an example in their construction of the Nazi racial state. Jim Crow was referenced by Nazi lawyers in September 1933 in a series of recommendations for the revision of German criminal law under the Third Reich known as the Prussian Memorandum.<sup>163</sup> The Memorandum that served as a template for the Nuremberg Blood Law of 1935, directly referenced the South with the observation, “it is well-known...that the southern states of North America maintain the most stringent separation between the white population and coloreds in both

<sup>163</sup> Whitman, *Hitler’s American Model*, 83.

public and personal interactions.”<sup>164</sup> In a subsequent 1934 planning meeting, southern Jim Crow laws were again discussed as a possible model to incorporate into the upcoming Nuremberg Laws. The Nazi press encouraged the Reich to adopt a southern model. An article in *Das Schwarze Korps*, the official newspaper of the *Schutzstaffel* or SS, noted:

In the freest country in the world, where even the president rages against racial discrimination, no citizen of dark colour is permitted to travel next to a white person, even if the white is employed as a sewer digger and the Negro is a world boxing champion or otherwise a national hero...[this] *example shows us all how we have to solve the problem of traveling foreign Jews* [emphasis added].<sup>165</sup>

Although it was eventually decided to forgo a formal segregation scheme as part of the Nuremberg Laws due to concerns about potential diplomatic blowback — Jim Crow like segregation did occur.<sup>166</sup> Signalled by the Aryan Clause and the Nuremberg Laws that Jews were fair game, private citizens and local business and later municipal governments instituted segregationist policies. Businesses pushed out Jewish investors, libraries banned books written by Jewish authors, and local businesses and municipalities limited Jewish access to facilities.<sup>167</sup> Restrictions promulgated between 1935 and 1937 banned or limited access at pools and spas to Jews in certain parts of the country. Signs suddenly appeared stating, "Jewish presence is undesired", or "Entrance is denied to Jews." For instance, the Mannheim indoor swimming pool was closed to Jews on July 10, 1935 and the city pool at Bad Kissingen was mandated *Judenfrei* on 4 July 1937.<sup>168</sup> By early 1938 the prohibition was expanded nationwide.<sup>169</sup> In July 1938 new rules were promulgated required the renaming of streets named after Jews, and Jews were banned

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<sup>164</sup> Whitman, *Hitler's American Model*, 86.

<sup>165</sup> "Hitler Adopts U.S. Jim Crow in Germany", *The Chicago Defender*, Jan.7, 1939.

<sup>166</sup> Whitman, *Hitler's American Model*, 99-104; With Jim Crow, the South offered the world a thorough and sophisticated system of racial control influencing not only the Nazis but also the governance of Haiti under U.S. military rule in between 1915 and 1934 (Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*).

<sup>167</sup> Burleigh and Wiperman, *The Racial State*, 83.

<sup>168</sup> Armin Nolzen, "The Nazi Party and its Violence Against the Jews, 1933-1939: Violence as a Historiographical Concept," *Yad Vashem Studies*, XXXI, Jerusalem 2003, 244-286; John Heineman, Boston College, "Chapter VI, The Third Reich and the Jews 1933-1938."

<sup>169</sup> Paulgerhard Lohmann, *Jewish Fellow Citizens at Fritzlar* (Books on Demand, 2006), 39.

from sitting on certain park benches. By August 1938, the restrictions were expanded to block Jews from visiting the movies, concerts, and eating at certain restaurants.<sup>170</sup>

In addition to setting an example by their practices, southerners transmitted their ideas in person as well. An anecdote from France in 1927 highlights how southerners brought their racial ideas as well as their tourist dollars to Europe. When a delegation of American Legionnaires from the South visited France, resort owners requested additional police protection to mitigate any potential racially motivated violence between their southern guests and the clubs' Black musicians and entertainers. Near the end of their trip, James Parrish, one of the southern Legionnaires from Virginia upon entering a restaurant on the *Rue Monsart* noticed the presence of four African Americans. Parrish complained to the management about the lack of racial hygiene and demanded the Black patrons be ejected. When his protest went unheeded, Parrish called for support from five of his fellow southerners. "A free-for-all fight ensued in which Parrish used a knife on a policeman who interfered."<sup>171</sup> Southerners also conveyed their racist ideas to Europeans at the highest levels of government. William Dodd, a southerner, who was the U.S. ambassador to Germany from 1933-1937, in a face-to-face meeting with Hitler, encouraged him to deal with Germany's "Jewish problem" in a more American manner, by 'unofficially' limiting the number of Jews in influential positions.<sup>172</sup>

The transnational exchange of ideas between the South and fascist Europe not only spurred racial legislation, but also conceptions of racial violence. One example involved the 'Black Shame' campaign, or *Schwarze Schmach*, spurred by the disgust felt by some Germans of having black colonial French troops from Senegal occupy the Rhineland. The initiative achieved international status. Prominent Americans such as

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<sup>170</sup> Burleigh and Wiperman, *The Racial State*, 87.

<sup>171</sup> *Chicago Defender*, "Georgia Bully whipped in Paris Café: Legion Vets Find France is Different," October 1, 1927, 1; The police report records that James Parrish was from Virginia, not Georgia, see Rachel Anne Gillett, *At Home in Our Sounds: Music, Race, and Cultural Politics in Interwar Paris* (Oxford University Press, 2021), 87.

<sup>172</sup> William Dodd, "Memorandum by the Ambassador in Germany (Dodd)," March 26, 1934, Document 188 in the *U.S. Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1934, Europe Near East and Africa, Volume II* (Washington, D.C., United States Government Printing Office, 1951).

President Wilson and two Democratic senators pressured France to replace African troops stationed in the Rhineland in order to protect the purity of white German women. The Republican presidential candidate in 1920, Warren G. Harding, responded to the *Schwarze Schmach* by promising on the campaign trail to do his best “to get those niggers out of Germany.”<sup>173</sup> Ray Beveridge, the granddaughter of an American senator, was one of the leading voices of the campaign. She toured Germany with the message that Blacks are a threat to white women always and everywhere. She spread that message at more than a hundred speaking engagements in America and in Germany. In one such speech in Germany, Beveridge exclaimed, "Once more I appeal to the German men in the occupied territory: your weapons have been taken from you, but there is always a rope and a tree. Take up the natural weapons used by our men in the South: lynch!"<sup>174</sup> In his 1940 film, *Jew Suss*, Nazi filmmaker Veit Harlan's presented lynching as the just punishment for a 'Court Jew' who rapes a newly married German girl and tortures her husband.<sup>175</sup>

The Ku Klux Klan achieved international influence as it inspired similar movements around the world from Nazi Germany to New Zealand. A U.S. Klansman founded The German Order of the Fiery Cross (*Der Deutsche Orden des feurigen Kreuzes*) in Berlin in 1923 with the avowed purpose of “ridding the country of undesirables by fighting Jews.” The German journal *Hammer Magazine* welcomed the Klan's activity hoping that its presence would “encourage many German minds.”<sup>176</sup> The Klan proudly claimed to be a source of inspiration to the Nazi movement, stating, “The spark that fired Hitler and other German nationalists to build a new Germany may easily have been ignited by the example of the Ku Klux Klan.”<sup>177</sup> *Der Weltkampf*, an

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<sup>173</sup> Dick Van Galen Last, *Black Shame: African Soldiers in Europe, 1914-1922* (NY, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 182.

<sup>174</sup> Last, *Black Shame*, 251.

<sup>175</sup> Veit Harlan, *Jud Süß*, 1940. accessed via <https://www.bitchute.com/video/Y3CoTZNypNk/>

<sup>176</sup> Michael Newton, *White Robes and Burning Crosses: A History of the Ku Klux Klan from 1866* (North Carolina: McFarland, Incorporated, Publishers, 2014), 85.

<sup>177</sup> Wyn Wade, *The Fiery Cross*, 268.

ideological journal of the Nazi Party, reprinted speeches by the Klan's Imperial Wizard about race mongrelisation.<sup>178</sup> The Third Reich even banned anti-Klan literature.<sup>179</sup>

The inspiration flowed in the other direction as well. The Klan praised Mussolini's rise to power as a "sign of political health in Italy" and as a blow against the spread of Bolshevism. The *Imperial Night-Hawk*, a Klan periodical, asserted that Mussolini's campaign against the communists was "an entirely worthy cause." The Oklahoma's Farmer's Labour Union described the Klan as "a legitimate offspring of the Facista movement in Italy." Ex-klansman, George Deatherage, was so inspired by the Nazis, that he encouraged his followers to switch from burning crosses to burning swastikas when he attempted to revive the Klan-like Knights of the White Camellia in the 1930s.<sup>180</sup> A French writer traveling in the U.S. in the 1920s observed that the Klan was "Fascist in inspiration."<sup>181</sup> Yale professor, Arthur Corning White, argued the Klan and European fascists were linked by the same underlying social dynamics that generated fear in the middle class of economic displacement in a rapidly changing world.<sup>182</sup>

The Klan attracted Hitler's attention. In 1937, The Nazis attempted to operationalize the Klan as a vehicle for spreading fascism in the United States. Baron Manfred von Killinger, the Nazi consul general in San Francisco, made arrangements for one of his agents, Leslie Fry to purchase the Klan outright for seventy-five thousand dollars in order to use it as an umbrella organization to unite the various factions of American fascism. The FBI foiled the purchase and chased Fry out of the country (she fled to fascist Italy) before the transaction could be consummated.<sup>183</sup> Thereafter, a less organized effort was pursued over the course of the next three years by Fritz Kuhn, leader of the German Bund, to merge the Bund with the Klan. The effort was stymied by

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<sup>178</sup> Katznelson, *Fear Itself*, 283.

<sup>179</sup> Walter White's anti-Klan novel *The Fire in the Flint* was burned by the Nazis, see White, *A Man Called White*, 68.

<sup>180</sup> Newton, *White Robes and Burning Crosses*, 85.

<sup>181</sup> Nancy Maclean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 179.

<sup>182</sup> Arthur Corning White, "An American Fascismo," *Forum* Volume 72, (1924): 636-641.

<sup>183</sup> Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 172

southern Klan members even while their northern counterparts pursued it. The apex of the merger discussions was a joint Klan-Bund rally at a New Jersey Bund camp in August 1940. The negative attention generated by the rally in the media and among congressional investigators eliminated any further discussions of a merger.<sup>184</sup>

Although the transnational exchange of racist ideas that occurred was by no means widely articulated by the mainstream press, the connection was recognized by Jews, African Americans, and their liberal allies.<sup>185</sup> Shortly after the Nuremberg Laws were instituted, African American columnist J.A. Rogers wrote, “Not only is there Fascism in America now, but Mussolini and Hitler copied it from us. What else are Jim Crow laws but Fascist laws.”<sup>186</sup> The American Jewish press compared Nazi laws restricting Jews from health resorts as “Jim Crow” laws.<sup>187</sup>

Others perceived the opposite, that the Nazis were inspiring southerners. The African American journal, *The Crisis*, printed a cartoon that conflated the persecution of Jewish and Black people along with Nazis and the Klan titled “Giving him some fresh ideas.”<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Wyn Wade, *The Fiery Cross*, 271.

<sup>185</sup> A newspaper database search of “Nuremberg Laws” and “Jim Crow” or “lynching” between 1935 and 1940 returns no articles that cite American influences on the Nuremberg Laws, even as stories on the Nuremberg Laws, Jim Crow and lynching were reported side-by-side on the same page as separate articles.

<sup>186</sup> Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 194.

<sup>187</sup> *The American Israelite*, June 29, 1939, 12; *Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle*, June 30, 1939, 1.

<sup>188</sup> *The Crisis*, June 1934, 158.

Figure 8: “Nazi Persecution of Jews and Negroes”



Source: *The Crisis*, June 1934.

The African American *Kansas Whip* asserted in 1939, “the promoters of the Klan and...some of the Jim-crow advocates...are borrowing from the Nazis racial theories.”<sup>189</sup> Although there were varying opinions as where the wellspring lay, there was nonetheless a firm feeling that the two systems were similar. The NAACP equated the persecution of minorities in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy to the lynching of African Americans in the South.<sup>190</sup> Georg Iggers, a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany who moved to Virginia in 1938, observed, “they [Blacks] were being treated just like we Jews were being treated in Germany.”<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> "Polish War of Importance to All Negro Race by Albert Marshall." *Kansas Whip*, September 22, 1939, 1.

<sup>190</sup> "NAACP to Fight Nazism and Fascism; Wants America to Make Democracy Work Here," *Negro Star*, January 20, 1939, 1.

<sup>191</sup> Mitchell, *Plantations and Death Camps*, 7.



Even though racism was only considered as a secondary characteristic by interwar Americans in their understanding of fascism, this line of attack became the most prevalent and damaging claim linking the South to European fascism. The South was vulnerable on this topic because of the substantial similarities regarding its legislative racial state and acceptance of extra judicial violence. By the late 1930s, German and Italian Jews, like Black southerners, were subject to segregation, *de facto* state sanctioned extra judicial violence, and second-class status in society; the dignity of these individuals was subject to a constant state of degradation and disrespect. There were distinct parallels in the racial social structures of the South and the European fascist states to a degree that was not true of any other region in the United States. The same can be said about the transnational exchanges of ideas. These observations support the allegation the claim that the South represented America's fascist region. However, one data point does not make a pattern. Additional validation is assessed by consideration of the South's labour policies and political system in the following sections.

#### **4.4. Labour**

*The Economist* opined in 1937 that next to anti-Black racism, the only southern prejudice almost as strong was against organized labour.<sup>192</sup> The repression of labour unions was a joint project between southern conservatives and progressives. Conservatives despised the communist and interracial association. Progressives, as part of their vision of a new South, favoured a low wage unorganized workforce to attract industry. Politically, the Bourbons, or old guard Democratic political elite, were eager to avoid any movement, like the Populists of the late nineteenth century, that conspired to merge the interests of poor white southerners with African Americans against their vice-like control over southern politics.

The struggle against labour unions was fundamental to the popularity of fascism in Europe. Organized labour was violently suppressed in Italy and Germany due to its perceived association with Bolshevism. The Italian Fascist state liquidated all non-Fascist

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<sup>192</sup> "United States," *The Economist*, May 1, 1937, 272.

labour unions and banned all strikes and labour actions with the Palazzo Vidoni Pact (1925) and the Rocco Law (1926).<sup>193</sup> The Nazis, a mere four months into Hitler's tenure as German Chancellor, dismembered Germany's largest independent labour union and arrested its leadership. German workers were subsequently incorporated into the NSDAP controlled union, the German Labour Front.<sup>194</sup>

When communist labour organizers entered the South and began recruiting across racial lines, it outraged many southerners and catalysed a counter reaction similar to the Italian experience in 1919. Just as in Italy, where *squadristi* emerged to fight labour-related violence Milan and Trieste and later in the agricultural areas of the Po Valley, southerners formed their own fascist 'Black Shirt' militia to suppress communist labour agitation. The Black Shirts or American Fascisti was founded in Atlanta, Georgia in the spring of 1930 as a response to the American Communist Party's efforts to interracially organize Black and white southern textile workers.<sup>195</sup> The American Fascisti's stance was that "communists posed the greatest menace to this country that we have ever known." By adopting black shirts, they signalled their integration in with the global fascist movement.<sup>196</sup>

Within weeks of forming, the Black Shirts attracted a membership of approximately twenty-seven thousand in Georgia. While their primary support came from the lower-class men, the Black Shirts also had an interest in attracting women and professionals. A woman's auxiliary organization, The Black Skirts, was envisioned.<sup>197</sup> One of its professional members, an Atlanta based attorney, travelled around Georgia proselyting on behalf of the group while lecturing on the horrors of Bolshevism and praising Mussolini for restoring order in Italy.<sup>198</sup> The Black Shirts successfully wooed factory workers and the unemployed by appealing to their racism and economic fears.

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<sup>193</sup> Bosworth, *Mussolini's Italy*, 226 – 227.

<sup>194</sup> Kershaw, *Hitler*, 288 - 289.

<sup>195</sup> Fronczak, "The Fascist Game," 574-576.

<sup>196</sup> Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 107, 580.

<sup>197</sup> John Hammond Moore, "Communists and Fascists in a Southern City: Atlanta, 1930," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 67 (1968): 443-448.

<sup>198</sup> Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 112.

They gained traction with textile workers by promising to negotiate with mill owners to ensure that whites received preference over their Black counterparts. For the unemployed, the group promised to help them gain employment by displacing Black workers.<sup>199</sup> The Black Shirts argued that Black workers belonged on the farm not in the city. In 1930, they paraded around Atlanta with banners proclaiming, “Niggers back to the cotton fields, city jobs are for white folk.”<sup>200</sup> The organization’s efforts at providing jobs and protecting the traditional racial order turbo charged its initial membership drive.

The Black Shirts had a dedicated ‘military department’ for internal security and, like European fascists, its members were not above utilizing violence against their enemies. They cheered the killing of a Black college student who allegedly insulted a white woman and intimidated the supporters of jailed communists. They beat a young attorney who had signed a petition in favour of free speech for communists.<sup>201</sup> The local grand jury found that Black Shirts menaced the Black domestic servants of wealthy white families, and threatened local employers, including Coca-Cola Corporation. One employer reported that the Black Shirts threatened to kill him.<sup>202</sup> Liberal southerners decried the Black Shirts as “aping the reactionary institutions of Europe.”<sup>203</sup>

At first, the Black Shirts enjoyed the support of the local police and elites. The former mayor of Atlanta acted as the group’s attorney and filed the organization’s application for a charter.<sup>204</sup> The group was able to march where it pleased, held a number of meetings in local high schools, and used the steps of the state capitol for a rally.<sup>205</sup> This support lasted for about three months. The Black Shirts lost the support of the local elite once it became clear that their program would disrupt the labour market among low-cost Black workers. Black workers were commonly paid less than whites and would work

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<sup>199</sup> Moore, “Communists and Fascists in a Southern City,” 445.

<sup>200</sup> Tindall, *The Emergence of the South*, 373.

<sup>201</sup> “Black Shirts in Georgia,” *The New Republic*, October 8, 1930, 206.

<sup>202</sup> Charles Martin, “White Supremacy and Black Workers: Georgia’s ‘Black Shirts’ Combat the Great Depression,” *Labor History* 18:3 (1977): 373, 376, 378.

<sup>203</sup> Moore, “Communists and Fascists in a Southern City,” 444, 452-453

<sup>204</sup> “Black Shirts in Georgia,” *The New Republic*, October 8, 1930, 205.

<sup>205</sup> Moore, “Communists and Fascists in a Southern City,” 446, 448.

dirty jobs that whites would not perform. Prioritizing their economic interests over their racial biases, Atlanta elites who depended upon low-cost Black labour for household services and their businesses withdrew their support.<sup>206</sup> Contributing to the group's demise were the personal legal problems of its co-founder and leader Holt Gewinner, who was pursued by the court for tax evasion and passing a bad check. He was eventually sentenced to six months in prison.<sup>207</sup> Birthed in June 1930, the Black Shirts were gone as an organized force by October.

Not to be outdone by Georgia, Alabama hosted its own self-admitted fascist inspired organization to fight against organized labour: the White Shirts or White Legionnaires of Birmingham. Its leaders coordinated with local police to break local strikes and inflicted terror upon labour organizers including kidnapping and beatings.<sup>208</sup> In 1934, Birmingham police recruited about fifteen hundred White Legionnaires to help with security for a May Day labour protest. Before the speakers could address the crowd, police officers and Legionnaires began beating and arresting protesters.<sup>209</sup> Communist organizers denounced the White Legion as a variant of global fascism and compared its activities to that of the *Sturmabteilung* (SA) in Nazi Germany.<sup>210</sup>

The confluence of southern attitudes towards communism, organized labour, and racial justice were also on display in the Angelo Herndon case. Herndon was an African American Communist who was arrested in Atlanta in 1932. As a result of his attempts to organize the unemployed and distribute communist literature he was charged with attempting to incite a rebellion.<sup>211</sup> The local Atlanta prosecutor, John Hudson, sought the death penalty as punishment based on a slave era insurrection law.<sup>212</sup> A columnist in *The*

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<sup>206</sup> Martin, "White Supremacy and Black Workers," 381.

<sup>207</sup> Moore, "Communists and Fascists in a Southern City," 453.

<sup>208</sup> Fronczak, "The Fascist Game," 574-576.

<sup>209</sup> Robin Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 98.

<sup>210</sup> "In Dixieland We Take Our Stand," *The New Masses*, May 29, 1934, 8.

<sup>211</sup> Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 161.

<sup>212</sup> The insurrection law was based on a 1833 statute passed by the Georgia legislature. It declared it a capital offense either to incite or to attempt to incite a revolt among slaves or to circulate written materials

*Nation* argued that if prosecutors prevailed against Herndon, “the forces of reaction and fascism in Georgia will have temporarily triumphed.”<sup>213</sup>

The Ku Klux Klan attempted to leverage the atmosphere of anti-labour sentiment as a recruiting device. In 1933, the Klan announced that it was going to revive itself in order to “wage war on communism in the South.”<sup>214</sup> Middle- and upper-class southerners did not need to wait for a reinvigorated Klan. They were perfectly capable of mounting vigilante action on their own. The *Labour Defender* reported that a group of plantation owners led by the local sheriff raided an interracial meeting of the communist led Share Croppers Union in Camp Hill, Alabama in 1931. White southerners broke up the meeting and returned with reinforcements comprised of businessmen, landowners, and deputies which resulted in a gunfight between whites and Blacks. Share Croppers Union member Ralph Gray was killed and several other people were injured. At least thirty Black men were later arrested for participating in the meeting and engaging in violence against the white vigilantes.<sup>215</sup> Incidents like these were the reason the South ranked number one when it came to organized labour related deaths during the interwar period.

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for the purposes of inspiring resistance or revolt by slaves or free persons ‘of color,’ see Belknap, *American Political Trials*, 162.

<sup>213</sup> Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 181.

<sup>214</sup> Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 167.

<sup>215</sup> *Labor Defender*, February 1932.

**Figure 9: Number of Strike Related Deaths by Era and Region**

Period	Region				Total	Annual Average
	Northeast	Midwest	West	South		
Gilded Age	124	114	43	78	359	15.0
Progressive Era	76	61	164	79	380	20.0
Lean 1920s	10	27	18	79	134	13.4
Depression	22	42	18	62	144	14.4
WWII & aftermath	3	4	2	16	25	3.1
Post-WWII						
Golden Years	3	4	0	24	31	1.3
Total	238	252	245	338	1073*	

Source: Paul Lipold and Larry Isaac, "Striking Deaths: Lethal Contestation and the "Exceptional" Character of the American Labour Movement, 1870-1970," *International Review of Social History* 54, no. 2 (2009): 201.

While the number of fatalities declined over the course of the 1930s, the reported number of beatings increased as union organizers were waylaid by company thugs and sometimes irate citizens who were persuaded that unions would bankrupt their employers.<sup>216</sup> In June 1937, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) listed eleven major “centres of repression.” Six of the eleven areas were in the South, even though the South only represented thirty percent of the population.<sup>217</sup> While labour violence was widespread across the United States in the 1930s, only in Georgia were strikers and labour organizers rounded up and interned in what were labelled “concentration camps” by the press. In 1934, the *New York Times* routinely identified the Georgia camps, established by Governor Eugene Talmadge, as “concentration camps” and described them as an example of “Hitlerism” come to America.<sup>218</sup> The *New Republic* commented, “The suppression of all liberties in Georgia and the killing of sixteen workers... suggest that in certain areas of our fair land even the Nazis might earn a trick or two.”<sup>219</sup>

<sup>216</sup> Tindall, *Emergence of the South*, 530

<sup>217</sup> Census Bureau, *1940 Census of Population: Volume 1*, 14.

<sup>218</sup> Fronczak, “The Fascist Game,” 574.

<sup>219</sup> Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 180.

In Germany, Goebbels's newspaper *Der Angriff* celebrated the "first concentration camp in the USA."<sup>220</sup> The German press used Talmadge's camp as evidence that "Germany is decades ahead of the rest of the world [in concentration camps]" and predicted the U.S. would move "more and more in fascist direction." Interviewed a year later in 1935, Talmadge openly expressed his admiration for fascism, saying he thought "a heap of Hitler and Mussolini for they are strong men, and they must be helping their people or the people wouldn't have them." Most conservative Georgians supported Talmadge's anti-labour actions as well as his efforts to root out subversive communist literature from schools. Groups such as the American Legion organized book burning parties to purge the state of red literature.<sup>221</sup>

Events in Kentucky provided another example to those who perceived the South's labour practices as fascist. Miners who were discontented with the lack of adequate support from the United Mine Workers of America welcomed the assistance of the communist-affiliated National Miners Union (NMU). Local officials responded by creating a hostile environment for these labour organizers by deputizing company-paid mine guards as law officers and arranging for the cooperation of the local courts to levy the harshest sentences. One coal miner from the region wrote FDR in 1937, "in that corner of Kentucky conditions can only be compared to Germany under Hitler."<sup>222</sup>

Georgia, Alabama, and Kentucky were not anomalies. Across the South, politicians used the power of the state to strangle organized labour movements through local ordinances that charged unions fees to organize workers and by adopting open shop or 'right to work' statutes.<sup>223</sup> They also supported police action against strikers and passed laws restricting labour mobility.<sup>224</sup> Southern industrialists used race-baiting tactics to divide workers and northern union organizers were often portrayed as carpetbaggers or

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<sup>220</sup> Fronczak, "The Fascist Game," 575.

<sup>221</sup> Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 180-188.

<sup>222</sup> Tindall, *Emergence of the South*, 528.

<sup>223</sup> Ray Marshall, "Labor in the South," *The Antioch Review* 21, no. 1 (1961): 89.

<sup>224</sup> Gerald Friedman, "The Political Economy of Early Southern Unionism: Race, Politics, and Labor in the South, 1880-1953," *The Journal of Economic History* 60, no. 2 (2000): 385.

communists.<sup>225</sup> Walter White of the NAACP recounted hearing an anti-union southern proclaim, “I’d rather see Hitler and Hirohito win the war than work beside a nigger on the assembly line.”<sup>226</sup> These tactics were successful. The per capita membership in organized labour for industrial workers in the South was only half that of non-Southern states in 1939.<sup>227</sup>

The comparable labour practices between the South and fascist Europe were not only grounded in immediate socioeconomic challenges of the interwar years, but also the transnational exchange of ideas. Baron von Herman, Germany’s agricultural attaché to the United States, admired the South’s racial state as he travelled through the region at the end of the nineteenth century. He was impressed by the apparent political docility and labour discipline of southern Black workers. Based on his observations, he retained Booker T. Washington to recruit a group of African American cotton growing experts from the Tuskegee Institute to go to German Africa, Togo, in 1901 to train locals in the southern plantation model. The changes recommended by the Tuskegee mission greatly expanded cotton production. This success raised the profile of the South’s labour and racial policies and the southern plantation model was expanded to other German colonial holdings. The British and French sought to replicate the German success by hiring the Tuskegee Institute to import the southern plantation model for their own colonies. In 1909, German Colonial Secretary Bernhard Dernburg noting the success of southern agriculture model, concluded that the only way to keep ‘Negros’ productive was through coercive methods. The transnational exchange of ideas was also evidenced by Max Weber’s speech given at the 1904 St. Louis Exposition. Weber advised southerners to emulate Germany’s treatment of ethnic Poles in their management of their Black workers — specifically, to push them out of the country.<sup>228</sup> Many southerners thought this was excellent advice and the forced expulsion of African Americans became the prime objective of Mississippi senator Theodore Bilbo in the 1930s.

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<sup>225</sup> Dale Newman, "Labor Struggles in the American South." *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 14/15 (1979): 42.

<sup>226</sup> White, *A Man Called White*, 225.

<sup>227</sup> Friedman, "The Political Economy", 393.

<sup>228</sup> Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa*, 4-5, 79-81, 167, 174-176, 195, 209.



In Germany, members of the *Verein für Socialpolitik* (Social Policy Association), an influential organization formed by a number of prominent German social scientists to formulate labour policy, closely studied the southern labour model. *Verein* members became convinced of the value of incorporating race into labour models after considering how the ‘simple’ American “Negro” was held in servitude through racism and sharecropping. The *Verein* even invited African American W.E.B. Du Bois into their institute for short time to serve as a source of information on southern Black labour. Impressed by how racial strictures could be used to extract maximum productivity from ‘inferior’ workers, some *Verein* members proposed evicting Slavs from the German East and replacing them with less assimilable and more controllable Asian “coolies” and black Africans.<sup>229</sup>

It is not surprising that coercive labour was a common denominator among those who adhered to these ethnic-national viewpoints. The interwar South, Germany, and Italy all resorted to coercive labour. Between 1939 and 1945 the Nazis created one of the largest forced labour systems in history ruling over between eight to twelve million coerced foreign workers. It represented the largest use of forced foreign labour since the end of slavery in the United States. Historian Stanley Elkins wrote, “The only mass experience that Western people have had within recorded history comparable in any way with Negro slavery was undergone in the nether world of Nazism. The concentration camp was . . . a perverted slave system.”<sup>230</sup> Other historians such as Richard Rubenstein and Beverly Mitchell also have equated American plantation slavery to forced labour under fascism. Rubenstein wrote, “The sea journey of the slave ships was a horror comparable only to the German freight cars.”<sup>231</sup> Beverly Mitchell argued that while separated by time and space, concentration camps and slavery shared the similar “psychic and emotional terrain” of forced labour, familial separation, and spiritual degradation.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa*, 69, 80, 103-109.

<sup>230</sup> Stanley Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 104.

<sup>231</sup> Richard Rubenstein, *The Cunning of History: The Holocaust and the American Future* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 38

<sup>232</sup> Mitchell, *Plantations and Death Camps*, 4-5.

Author William Styron considered the German labour camps, especially Auschwitz, as the continuation of southern slavery.<sup>233</sup>

In Fascist Italy, a decree promulgated in February 1942 co-opted all men between the age of eighteen and fifty-five as part of a mandatory labour force. Over the course of the war, Mussolini shipped approximately 320,000 Italian workers to Germany where they experienced harsh conditions and racism. Conditions worsened for them when Italy withdrew from the war in September 1943, at which point, they were treated as slaves.<sup>234</sup> The Italians also coerced Jews to work in its captured Balkan territories.<sup>235</sup>

In the interwar South, forced labour took the form of sharecropping, debt servitude, and convict labour.<sup>236</sup> Under the system of convict leasing, approximately one hundred thousand Black prisoners, often convicted of petty crimes such as vagrancy, were ‘sold’ to companies to work off their fines in farm fields, lumber camps, railroad construction gangs and, mines, where it was not uncommon for them to be treated worse than slaves. Douglas Blackmon estimated that over one hundred thousand Black prisoners were worked in slave-like conditions under the system of convict leasing prevalent in the South during first decades of the twentieth century.<sup>237</sup> During World War II, in order to keep on grip on Black agricultural labour, southern businessmen pressed local government to stem the tide of Black workers leaving the region. In one case, police in Greenville, Mississippi dragged Black workers who were trying to leave the region off trains, and in another instance, police in Savannah, Georgia arrested every Black person

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<sup>233</sup> William Styron, preface to *The Cunning of History*, xii.

<sup>234</sup> Ulrich Herbert, "Forced Laborers in the Third Reich: An Overview," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 58 (2000): 192-193; Mark Spoerer, and Jochen Fleischhacker, "Forced Laborers in Nazi Germany: Categories, Numbers, and Survivors," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 33, no. 2 (2002): 201; "Labor Conditions in Fascist Italy." *Monthly Labor Review* 57, (1101): 919; Christian Goeschel, *Mussolini and Hitler: The Forging of the Fascist Alliance* (Yale University Press, 2018), 210-211.

<sup>235</sup> "September 1942, Jews in forced labor in Gorizia in the Italian-occupied territories," Yad Vashem Photo Archives 4613/82, World Holocaust Remembrance Center.

<sup>236</sup> Robert Evans, "Some Notes on Coerced Labor," *The Journal of Economic History* 30, no. 4 (1970): 866.

<sup>237</sup> Douglas Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Anchor Books, 2008), 7.

found in the railway station. Many southern jurisdictions placed onerous restrictions on hiring agents to enter their towns for the purpose of recruiting Black workers.<sup>238</sup>

Barrington Moore's "Prussian Road" theory suggests that the parallel labour practices between the South and fascist Europe were underpinned by common causal factors. Moore argued that in polities where the risk of social upheaval from an exploited peasant class is high, it is natural for the bourgeoisie and landed aristocracy to work together to create an authoritarian state that supports the continued extraction of surplus value from oppressed workers. Moore called this the "Prussian Road" or "capitalist reactionary route" towards modernization. Because of their reliance on the police power of the state (instead of market forces) to keep workers in line, repressive agrarians tended to support authoritarian regimes that later were the raw material for fascist states. Moore placed Germany and Japan in this category and alluded that the South fit as well with its system of plantation slavery.<sup>239</sup> Johnathan Wiener argued more forcefully that the South's labour practice of sharecropping squarely placed it on the "Prussian Road."<sup>240</sup> These shared roots cultivated a common discourse among Nazi, Italian, and interwar southern politicians, that exalted rural virtues as foundational to the preservation of traditional social structures.<sup>241</sup>

Whether it be the repression of labour unions or the cultivation of coerced labour, the South was distinctly similar to fascist Europe in its labour practices. Southerners, like German and Italian fascists, successfully suppressed organized labour through a combination of legal means and extra-judicial violence. The South was the least penetrated and most violent region in the United States when it came to labour unions. Like in fascist Europe, the disempowerment of organized labour not only allowed for exploitation of the workforce, but also benefited the political elite by eliminating a threat to their one-party rule. The use of coerced labour in German, Italy, and the South was

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<sup>238</sup> Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South: 1913-1945*, 149

<sup>239</sup> Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), 433-435.

<sup>240</sup> Johnathan Wiener, *Social Origins of the New South: Alabama 1860-1885* (Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 4-5.

<sup>241</sup> Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, 449-452; "Mussolini Awards Himself Agricultural Prize," *The Guardian*, October 15, 1928.

underpinned by common ideas regarding the prioritization of natural rights vis-à-vis racial considerations and the primacy of the state. Although labour policies were understood by most Americans as only a secondary characteristic of fascism, the South's *simpatico* practices in this area provides another data point that supports the legitimacy of the fascist allegation.

#### 4.5. Political Rights

The political rights of poor white and Black voters were sacrificed at the altar of the South's traditional racial and economic social structures as interwar southern elites endeavoured to create a *Herrenvolk* democracy — a democratic society for middle class and well-to-do whites only.<sup>242</sup> Just as the South disenfranchised African Americans and poor whites, the Italian and German fascist states legislated away the political rights of their citizens. Jews in Germany lost their electoral voice with the passage of the First Regulation to the Reich Citizenship Law in 1935.<sup>243</sup> Italians experienced intimidation at the polls even before they formally lost their political rights in 1926 when Mussolini consolidated his dictatorship. For instance, during the election of 1924, Fascists were known to beat up the first person voting in each district, shouting “Bastard, you voted for the socialists,” regardless for who the person had actually voted as a form of intimidation to the other voters in line.<sup>244</sup> Congressman Dickstein stated in 1934, “Hitlerism, fascism, and other ‘isms’ have made it a define plank in their programs to prevent the free exercise of the right to vote.”<sup>245</sup>

Like Germany and Italy, the South was essentially a one-party state during the interwar period. By the early 1930s the Democratic Party barred African Americans from its primary elections in every state in the old Confederacy — by state rules in eight and

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<sup>242</sup> Dewey Grantham, *Southern Progressivism*, xvii.

<sup>243</sup> Bill Ezzell, “Laws of Racial Identification and Racial Purity in Nazi Germany and the United States: Did Jim Crow Write the Laws That Spawned the Holocaust” in *Southern University Law Review*, Vol. 30, Issue 1 (2002): 8.

<sup>244</sup> Ebner, *Ordinary Violence in Mussolini's Italy*, 37-38.

<sup>245</sup> Radio Address of Hon Samuel Dickstein, October 28, 1933, quoted in the *Congressional Record* Volume 78 Part 1 (1934), 1030.

local rules in three.<sup>246</sup> Blocked from Democratic primaries, African American votes became worthless since Democratic candidates almost always triumphed in southern general elections.<sup>247</sup> Literacy requirements and poll taxes formed a secondary line of defence to keep poor whites and Blacks disenfranchised. While literacy tests existed across the country, poll tax requirements were concentrated in the South during the interwar period.<sup>248</sup> Adopted southern son and three-time Democratic presidential candidate, William Jennings Bryan, praised the limitation of democracy to white elites, “justified on the grounds that civilization has a right to preserve itself.” He continued, “the more advanced race will always control government as a matter of self-preservation not only for the benefit of the advanced race, but for the benefit of the backward race also.”<sup>249</sup> Writing before his time as president, Woodrow Wilson called the suppression Black political representation “the natural, inevitable ascendancy of the whites.”<sup>250</sup> Democratic Senator from North Carolina Furnifold Simmons, not mincing words about the goal of disenfranchisement, explained, “[it] embodies our plan for establishing White Supremacy upon a permanent basis.”<sup>251</sup> The editor of the *Charlestown News and Courier*, made the connection between the democratic practices in the South and fascist Europe, writing, “we Southerners are as hostile to democracy as Hitler is because we are unwilling for the Negro masses to vote and have a part in governing us.”<sup>252</sup>

Disenfranchisement worked: voting rates across the South were approximate one-half of those in the North. For example, while Ohio averaged 57% voter participation, most southern states averaged between 20% - 30%. Less than one percent of eligible

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<sup>246</sup> Oklahoma and Kentucky lacked white only primaries, but most Blacks in those states remained loyal to the Republican Party; Tindall, *Emergence of the South*, 166.

<sup>247</sup> This situation held until the Supreme court ruled white primaries unconstitutional in 1944 in the case of *Smith v. Allwright*, see V. O. Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, [1949] 2006), 620.

<sup>248</sup> *New York Times*, “West Threatens Fight on Poll Tax,” November 12, 1944.

<sup>249</sup> Bryan, “Bryan Says North Would Act as South on the Negro Question,” *New York Times*, March 18, 1923; Willard H. Smith, “William Jennings Bryan and Racism,” *The Journal of Negro History* 54, no. 2 (1969): 127-49.

<sup>250</sup> Woodrow Wilson, *Division and Reunion: 1829-1909* (Princeton: Harvard University, 1893), 278.

<sup>251</sup> Cell, *The Highest Stage*, 121.

<sup>252</sup> Grill and Jenkins, *The Nazis and the American South in the 1930s*, 686.

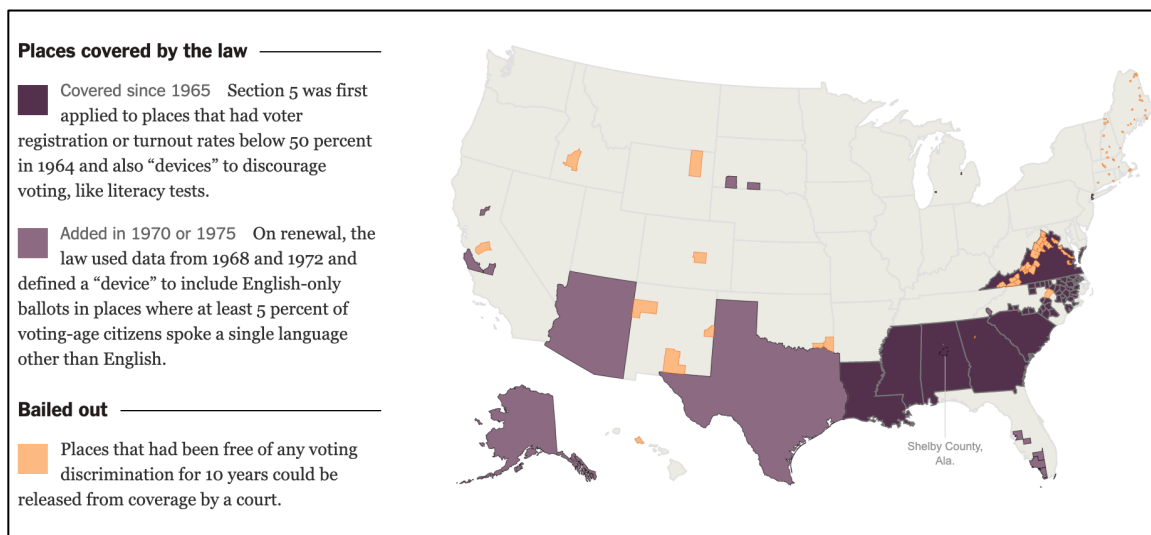
Black adults were registered to vote in Louisiana and Alabama in 1940; for Virginia it was less than ten percent.<sup>253</sup> Either deluded or mendacious, Senator Bilbo from Mississippi, a staunch advocate of white supremacy, claimed that the low voter participation among African Americans indicated their high degree of satisfaction with the existing political order.<sup>254</sup> The southern wall of disenfranchisement began to crack with the 1944 Supreme Court case *Smith v. Allwright* that outlawed white only primaries. It later received a crushing blow during the Civil Rights era with the passage of the twenty-fourth amendment in 1964 that outlawed poll taxes and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Under Section Five of the Voting Right Act, many southern states became subject to ongoing election monitoring by the federal government as a result of past discriminatory practices. The map below highlights how the southern states were especially targeted for ongoing federal surveillance as a result of their history violating the political rights of their citizens.

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<sup>253</sup> Key, *Southern Politics*, 493, 519-520.

<sup>254</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1938, Volume 83 Part 1:881.

**Figure 10: Suppression of Voting Rights**



Source: *New York Times*, “The Formula Behind the Voting Rights Act,” June 22, 2013.

Unfortunately for the South, the suppression of democracy was understood by most Americans as the number one characteristic of fascism. So even though the South did not restrict democracy to the degree of the European fascist states, southern political practices painted the region as fascist-like. The abridgment of political rights, along with the South’s racial state and its treatment of organized labour, completes the trifecta of illiberal social structures that provides legitimacy to the allegation that the South represented America’s fascist region.

#### **4.6. Conclusion**

Alvin Owsley who hailed from Texas and was the National Commander of the American Legion — the organization consisting of veterans returning from Europe after the First World War — in early 1923 proclaimed, “should the day ever come when they menace the freedom of our representative government, the Legion would not hesitate to take things into its own hands – to fight the ‘reds’ as the Fascisti of Italy fought them.” He continued, “the National Legion is to America what the Fascisti are to Italy.” The progressive editor of *The National Leader* attributed Owsley’s pro-fascist rhetoric to his

southern inspired worldview.<sup>255</sup> While it was not only southerners such as Owsley who considered fascism as a balm for troubled times during the interwar period, the South was perceived by many Americans as the country's most fascist like region.

Those critical of the South argued that while the rest of the country was progressing towards the ideals of equal rights and liberal democracy, the South seemed stuck in a quagmire of traditional customs, beliefs, and superstitions. To these critics, the region seemed out-of-step with the rest of the nation as a result its anti-modern and illiberal social structures that seemed more at home in countries that were perceived as uniquely un-American such as the fascist states.<sup>256</sup> This chapter assessed the fascist claim primarily to serve as context in the examination of the South's political response to fascism in the following chapters. However, on a stand-alone basis, this analysis also contributes to the historiography by testing the legitimacy of the claim of southern fascism during the interwar period. Post war, this allegation led to a turn in the discourse that weighed heavily upon the South and greatly contributed to the unwinding of its illiberal social structures.

The fascist claim against the South was tested by analysing the relative participation of southerners in fascist organizations and the assertions that the South shared with fascist Europe certain anti-modern and illiberal characteristics. The results from these three areas were mixed but ultimately proved conclusive. First, the allegation of southern fascism was not supported by the membership statistics of southerners in either European linked or nativist fascist organizations. There is no evidence that southerners were overrepresented in foreign-inspired and nativist fascist organizations. Furthermore, the connection made by some between the backwardness or anti-modernism of the South and European fascism also proved to not be convincing. Anti-modernism was not found to be an unambiguous characteristic of either the South or the European

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<sup>255</sup> "Legionnaire Head Raves," *The National Leader*, February 1923, 3; Farmers Non-Partisan Organization League, *The Nonpartisan Leader*, Volumes 14-16, 256.

<sup>256</sup> Both conservative Martin Dies and progressive New Dealer Harold Ickes grounded their respective definitions of Americanism in Jefferson's advocacy of natural rights as articulated in the Declaration of Independence. Harold Ickes, "What Constitutes an American", speech delivered in New York's Central Park, May 8, 1941. Congressman Martin Dies, "On Americanism," *The Evening News* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania), July 21, 1938, 19.



fascist states as instances of modernity abounded. At the extreme, the mechanisms of modernity provided the foundation for both the South's Jim Crow racial ordering and the gas chambers of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Relative participation and anti-modernism, the first two litmus tests, failed to support the fascist claim against the South. However, common ground was discovered upon the examination of the relative liberalism of South's racial state, labour policies, and democratic practices. Parallels in practice and transnational exchanges were found in varying degrees between the South and fascist Europe for each of these areas. Even though there was not a perfect match in the areas examined between the South and the fascist states, considered *in toto* enough of them shared a likeness to merit a common classification, similar to how Wittgenstein thought about "family resemblances:" a complicated network of overlapping and crisscrossing similarities, sometimes overall and sometimes of detail.<sup>257</sup> Based upon how Americans perceived fascism, it is not hyperbole to describe the interwar South as fascist in practice. How this dynamic influenced southern politicians who were inculcated with the values of their homeland when it came to responding to fascism is the subject of the next two chapters.

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<sup>257</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1958), 32.

## 5. The South's Political Response to Fascism

Even though an ocean distant from the turmoil of interwar European politics, the South had a distinct relationship with the fascist states during this period. As an entity it was widely identified as America's 'fascist region' even though the majority of Americans belonging to fascist-like organizations lived outside the South. *Prima facie*, this apparent paradox suggests that the identification of the South as fascist was just another rhetorical stepping stone laid by liberal critics in the long tradition of southern criticism. However, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, the South's racial, labour, and political practices shared a number of distinct similarities, networks, and exchanges with European fascism. Given these connections, how did southern politicians respond to European fascism? And how did their reactions affect American politics and policy?

The historiography is scant in regard to these questions and one of the key aims of this project is to fill the gap. The topic was directly addressed in a brief debate thirty years ago between historians Ray Arsenault and George Wright who argued opposite positions on whether there was a streak of fascism in the South's political tradition during the interwar period. Arsenault concluded that, in general, that any resemblance between southerners and European fascists was coincidental. He maintained that "fascism was not representative of southern demagoguery as a whole" because southerners did not self-identify as fascists. Conversely, Wright, an African American historian, argued that it was necessary to look beyond southerners' self-conception to their rhetoric and practices, concluding that there were similar characteristics between southern politicians and fascist leaders.<sup>1</sup>

A fuller treatment was provided by Johnpeter Grill and Robert Jenkins in a 1992 paper, "The Nazis and the American South in the 1930s: A Mirror Image?" that provided an extensive discussion related to the topic, albeit with a focus on southern journalists instead of politicians. The authors found that while, in general, white southern newspaper editors decried Nazi racial practices, they did not acknowledge any similarities to

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond Arsenault and George Wright, "The Folklore of Southern Demagoguery," in *Is There a Southern Political Tradition?: Essays and Commentaries* eds. Lacy Ford and Charles Eagles (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996), 119-120, 141-143.

southern racial practices. This was in stark contrast to southern African American journalists who drew explicit parallels. Grill and Jenkins also discussed Hitler's affinity for the South, ranging from his appreciation of the region's racial policies to his enjoyment of *Gone with the Wind*. The authors concluded that in spite of parallels in practice, the South was not receptive to Nazi overtures.<sup>2</sup>

More recently, Robert Brinkmeyer explored the reactions of southern writers to the rise of fascism in *The Fourth Ghost White Southern Writers and European Fascism, 1930-1950*. He focused on how the work of southern writers was shaped by the intersection of southern and fascist practices as well as the accusation of fascism levelled against their home region. Brinkmeyer found a range of responses in the authors he analysed based upon their political ideology. Progressive-leaning writers used the fascist comparison as leverage to lambast southern social structures and argue for change, while conservative writers rejected the fascist comparison and argued that traditional southern practices were a national treasure that stood as a bulwark against the encroachment of fascism into the United States.<sup>3</sup>

Building upon this historiography, this chapter examines the South's political response to fascism. Specifically, how did southern politicians talk about fascism compared to their non-southern counterparts, and how did their words and actions impact public policy? The methodologies employed to answer these questions include both text mining and hermeneutics. Text mining is the process of examining large collections of documents to discover new information or help answer specific research questions.<sup>4</sup> The technique unearths evidence and relationships that would otherwise remain buried in the mass of textual big data. In this case, the big data analysed — comprising in excess of one hundred thousand pages — was the U.S. Congressional Record, the official record of the proceedings and debates of the United States Congress, from January 1, 1930 through the start of World War II on September 1, 1939. In the analysis of this data, it is

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion of the reasons why the South rejected Hitler's advances; Grill and Jenkins, "The Nazis and the American South in the 1930s: A Mirror Image?," 667-94.

<sup>3</sup> Brinkmeyer, *The Fourth Ghost*, 22-23.

<sup>4</sup> Ted Kwartler, *Text Mining in Practice with R* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2017), 1-2.

recognized that the speeches given on the floor of Congress are not strictly policy discussions, but also buncombe: fodder for the press and local consumption in the member of Congress' district.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, these speeches and debates provide insight into the positions held by the congressmen and what they expected to play well to their constituents.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the proclivity of congressmen to engage in buncombe, members considered the content of the record important, often requesting that speeches given outside Congress be included and expressing irritation when such entreaties were objected to by other members. Members used the Record as a means to stay current on what was being said in Congress when they were away. It was relied upon as a key resource to make legislative strategy. In one instance, Senate majority leader, Joe Robinson, died with a copy of the Record in his hand as he worked late into the night.<sup>7</sup> The contents were often referenced for facts during congressional debates and any indication of abuse exposed a congressman to sanction. In 1938, Texas congressman Maury Maverick excoriated his colleague Sam Dickstein for using the Record to dox his political enemies. Maverick implored, "Mr. Speaker, the Congressional Record can be a medium of education, peace, and good will. But if we do not guard the information in it well, it can be the greatest instrument of oppression in the country."<sup>8</sup> In another case, Texas representative Thomas Blanton was censured and nearly expelled from Congress when he inserted in a profanity laced (mild by today's standards) letter into the Record that decried organized labour. The motion denounced him for disgracing the Record with prurient material that was an "indignity to the House" and was "transmitted to thousands

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<sup>5</sup> Buncombe originated with Felix Walker, a U.S. congressman (1817-23) who represented a region in western North Carolina that included Buncombe County. When questioned about giving a particularly pointless speech to a nearly empty congressional chamber, he reportedly stated that he was "speaking to Buncombe," see *American Heritage Dictionary Online* on 'debunk.' accessed October 25, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> "Congressman" is being used as a gender-neutral term for the sake of simplicity.

<sup>7</sup> Working late into the night on a strategy to push through Roosevelt's unpopular Court Reorganization Act, Senate Majority Leader Joe Robinson suffered a fatal heart attack. The next morning, his pajama-clad dead body was found sprawled on the floor of his apartment, a copy of the previous day's Congressional Record lying near his right hand, see U.S. Congress Senate Historian, "Death of a Majority Leader," accessed August 5, 2022; U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1939, Volume 84 Part 3:4219; U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1939, Volume 84 Part 1:748.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1937, Volume 82 Part 2:2036.

of homes and libraries throughout the country.”<sup>9</sup> In another incident, Senator Reynolds from North Carolina was humiliated and forced to publicly apologize after he accidentally submitted a less than flattering news clipping about fellow Democratic senator into the Record.<sup>10</sup>

U.S. congressional discourse was important from an international perspective as well. The fascist press paid close attention to the debates on Capitol Hill. As a one-time newspaper editor, Mussolini was an avid consumer of newspapers who claimed that he read thirty-five newspapers a day.<sup>11</sup> As a syndicated columnist for the Hearst papers he was familiar with the major debates in Congress and wrote about various aspects of U.S. domestic policy.<sup>12</sup> The German and Italian press reported on congressional speeches that were perceived as consequential to the fascist agenda. Hitler was a student of the historical congressional debates that led up to the U.S. involvement in World War I.<sup>13</sup> As Fuhrer, he paid attention to what was said in the U.S. Congress and was aware of the margins on key votes.<sup>14</sup>

In order to identify relevant conversations in the Congressional Record that comprised the discourse of fascism, the text was mined for the keywords: ‘Hitler’, ‘Mussolini’, ‘fascism’, ‘Nazi’, and ‘fascist’. For each keyword match, a database entry was created that included a synopsis of the conversation along with key details: the speaker, the date, and the location in the Record. If more than one keyword was present in a given conversation the instance was only counted once. Since the dataset is focused on the actual words spoken by the members of Congress it excludes newspaper articles, third party letters, and petitions submitted by constituents and entered into the Record by congressmen. Also excluded are instances when a keyword was conflated with Stalin or

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<sup>9</sup> *New York Times*, “Blanton Censured, Falls Later Infaint,” October 28, 1921.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1939, Volume 84 Part 5:5413.”

<sup>11</sup> Bosworth, *Mussolini*, 210.

<sup>12</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, November 26, 1933, E-3; March 11, 1934, 11.

<sup>13</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Hitler's Second Book* (New York: Enigma Books, [1928] 2015), 221-222.

<sup>14</sup> Drew Pearson and Robert S. Allen, *Washington Merry-Go-Round, Washington Merry-Go-Round*, February 8, 1939, 2; March 21, 1939, 1; U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1939, Volume 84 Part 5: 5418; *Jewish Daily Bulletin*, “Jewish Influence in America is Attacked by *Der Stuermer*,” September 20, 1934, 4.

communism in terms of making a general point about authoritarianism or totalitarian governments.<sup>15</sup> Based on these parameters, nine hundred and three comments on the topic of fascism were extracted from the Record for the years 1930 through 1939. These relevant conversations were captured and categorized in a database that serves as the source for the time series, geographic, and issue-based analyses presented throughout this chapter.

Each database entry was interpreted using a hermeneutical methodology. Hermeneutics is the theory and practice of interpretation of texts.<sup>16</sup> The concept of the ‘hermeneutical circle’ implies that the interpreter must reference the “whole” to understand the “parts” and the “parts” to understand the “whole.” In the case of southern rhetoric, the “whole” was the region’s distinctive parallels and transnational exchanges with fascist Europe. The “parts” were how responses to fascism shed light on the nature of southern social structures. For instance, in an example discussed in detail below, when a northern congressman used the word “shackles” repeatedly when disagreeing with a southern colleague on the topic of fascism, a hermeneutical approach provides insight that the term is a dog whistle attempt to shame the southern congressman into silence based on the South’s history of chattel slavery and illiberal social structures (e.g., chain gangs, tenet farming, debt slavery).

Each text-mined discussion was analysed using a hermeneutical approach and then categorized across multiple dimensions including topic and sentiment. Conversations were grouped by topic (e.g., anti-Semitism, the Italian-Ethiopian War, the

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<sup>15</sup> For example, Hamilton Fish’s discussion of “a super government and one-man control along the lines and precedents established by Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin”; U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record* Volume 81 Part 7 (1937), 7696.

<sup>16</sup> The name derives from the legendary Greek god Hermes who, as a messenger, bore knowledge and understanding between the Greek gods and the mortal realm. In the seventeenth century hermeneutics became associated with the interpretation biblical texts. Since then, a number of theologians and philosophers have developed variations of hermeneutic approaches for the application to other fields. Friedrich Schleiermacher, sometimes considered to be the founder of modern hermeneutics, argued that both linguistic and psychological interpretation is necessary in order to attain a true understanding of the written word. Subsequently, Wilhelm Dilthey broadened the field of interest of hermeneutics to include cultural systems and organizations and coined the phrase ‘hermeneutical circle’ to represent the idea that an interpreter must reference ‘the whole to understand the parts and the parts to understand the whole,’ see Margo Paterson and Joy Higgs, “Using Hermeneutics as a Qualitative Research Approach in Professional Practice,” *The Qualitative Report* Volume 10 Number 2 June 2005, 339-357.

New Deal) in order to provide data for a statistical analysis to discern how the South's connections to fascism manifested around specific public policies. The sentiment of each discussion was evaluated as either negative, positive/defensive, or observational. Conversations were classified as negative when the speaker was openly hostile to fascism; positive/defensive when the speaker either praised or defended an aspect of fascism; and 'observational' when the speaker alluded to characteristics of fascism but without an accompanying clear indication of condemnation or praise. For example, Representative Emanuel Celler's statement in June 1933, "there is in Germany a cruel persecution of the Jews which in its extent probably surpasses any recorded instance of persecution of Jewish history" is bucketed as negative because it clearly paints a pejorative picture of fascism.<sup>17</sup> Congressman Hamilton Fish's statement, "It is very likely that the Hitler dictatorship was necessary in the view of the strength and revolutionary activities of the Communist, which undermined the stability of the German Republic" is illustrative of a positive/defensive remark.<sup>18</sup> The categorization of discussions across multiple dimensions allowed for a statistical analysis of how fascism was discussed by region and issue.

A number of interesting insights emerged from this analysis. For the period 1930 – 1939, the data presents a picture of a relatively reticent South as compared to other regions of the U.S. when it came to discussions of fascism. Nevertheless, the South's contribution to the discourse on fascism must be assessed based on content not just quantity. A drill-down into the individual comments revealed that the southern delegation generated the overall most affirmative political discourse regarding fascism compared to other regions. This finding upends the prevailing historiography that the South did not have a distinctive political voice related to fascism.<sup>19</sup>

Southern congressmen displayed a utilitarian sensibility when discussing fascism, whether it be for opportunistic purposes of self-aggrandizement or as a strawman to

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<sup>17</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1933, Volume 77 Part 6:5321.

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1933, Volume 77 Part 4:4117; On a side note, in addition to the threat of communism, the unfairness of the Versailles Treaty was another factor frequently cited by congressmen to justify the appeal of fascism.

<sup>19</sup> Katznelson, *Fear Itself*, 287.

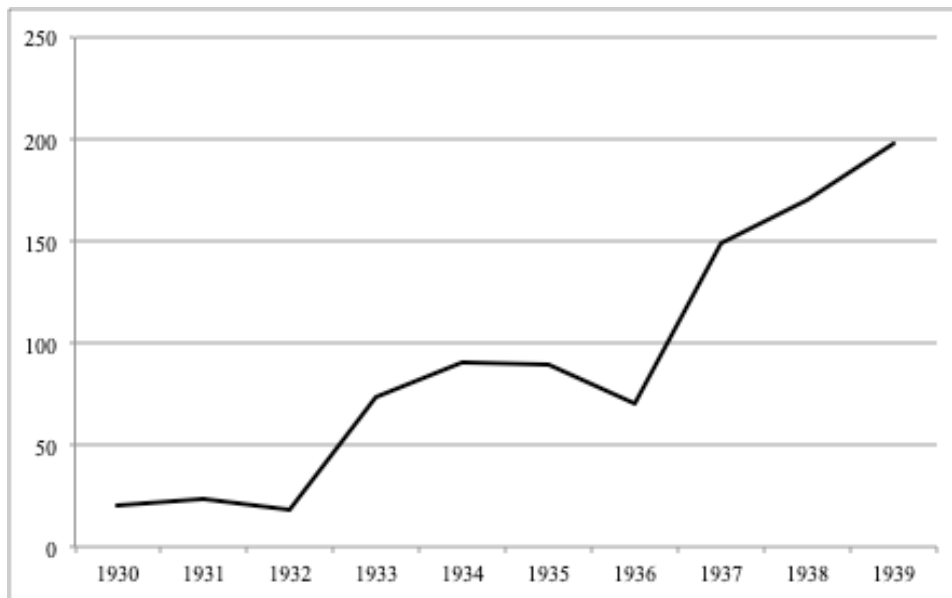
rationalize opposition to progressive reforms. Ideological nimble, at times they highlighted fascist practices from fascist Europe to justify southern practices, while on other occasions, they pointed to these regimes as examples of how overly powerful central governments are dangerous to the rights of individuals. A clear picture emerges from the analysis. Southern congressmen, compared their peers from other regions, were the most comfortable with the socio-economic structures of the fascist states. Their discourse provided encouragement for fascists around the world and inhibited the United States' response, both domestically and internationally, to the growing influence of fascism. Even though they dismissed as propaganda the charge that their region mirrored key fascist practices, southern congressmen revealed their (perhaps subconscious) pro-fascist subjectivity through a decade long pattern of words and behaviour.

### **5.1. Discursive Trends**

The analysis of the nine hundred plus congressional discussions related to fascism revealed both some expected behaviour and fascinating new insights. As anticipated, the frequency of conversations regarding fascism in Congress increased as the decade progressed (Figure 11). There were relatively few conversations when Mussolini was the primary actor, but after Hitler seized the German chancellorship in 1933, the number of conversations increased by approximately four-fold. The instances of conversations remained steady from 1933-36, averaging eighty-one per year. There was a dip in the frequency in 1936, perhaps owing to it being a presidential election year, but then it spiked upward in 1937 as comparisons proliferated between fascism and the New Deal in the wake of the more progressive second wave and Roosevelt's attempt to pack the Supreme Court. The continued increase in 1938 and 1939 was driven by international events such as the *Anschluss* and the Munich Pact.



**Figure 11:**  
**Number of Conversations Regarding Fascism in Congress**



It is possible to discern the South's perspective concerning fascism by peeling back the onion on these conversations. The insights garnered fall into three categories: the South's relative participation in these conversations, positive or defensive comments made regarding fascism, and how the region's voice was heard vis-à-vis the rest of the country in the chorus of condemnation.

### **5.1.1. Relative Participation**

For the period ranging from 1930 – 1939, the data presents a picture of a relatively quiescent South compared to other regions of the U.S. While the southern delegation held 27% of the seats in the House and Senate during the 1930s it accounted for only 22% of the conversations related to fascism, representing the largest relative degree of reticence for any region (Table 3). What accounted for southerners' aversion to weighing in on this important topic? There is evidence that the South's relative quietude was linked to a sensitivity engendered by the persistent allegations of southern fascism.

**Table 3: Fascist Related Discourse by Region<sup>20</sup>**

<b>Region</b>	<b>% of Congress</b>	<b>% Mentions of Fascism</b>	<b>1930 - 1939 Over/ (Under)</b>
Northeast	28.4%	29.7%	1.2%
Midwest	31.8%	30.4%	(1.4%)
South	27.5%	21.7%	(5.8%)
West	12.2%	18.2%	6.0%

An exchange between Representatives Will Taylor from Tennessee and Harold Knutson of Minnesota on March 20, 1934, is revealing. When Taylor spoke in favour of the McCormack-Dickstein Committee resolution to investigate Nazism in America, Knutson attempted to check him by alluding to the South’s fascist practices. The exchange was as follows:

Mr. TAYLOR: The purpose is to investigate the activities of the Nazis in the United States.

Mr. KNUTSON: What is my colleague’s attitude with reference to kidnappings and lynchings in this country?

Mr. TAYLOR: I am just as much opposed to them as I am to Hitlerism.

Mr. KNUTSON: What has the gentle man done to curb them?<sup>21</sup>

Another example occurred during an interaction between Senator Pat Harrison from Mississippi and Senator Arthur Vandenberg from Michigan in June 1934. During the exchange, Harrison advocated in favour of granting the Roosevelt administration additional authority to negotiate tariffs. Opposing this position, Vandenberg in his response keyed in on the word “shackle” Harrison used in his speech. Vandenberg

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<sup>20</sup> Census Bureau standard definitions adjusted to fit the historiographical thirteen state consensus definition of the South as follows: Northeast = CT, DE, ME, MD, MA, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT; Midwest = IN, IL, IA, KS, MI, MN, MO, NE, ND, OH, SD, WV, WI; South = AR, AL, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA; West = AK, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, MT, NV, NM, OR, UT, WA, WY. The “Percent of Congress” column represents each region’s relative congressional representation based upon both its number of representatives and senators. This weighting is used as a benchmark to indicate whether a region was over or underrepresented by its congressional delegation within the discourse of fascism; (U.S. Census Bureau, *Census Regions and Divisions of the United States*, August 20, 2018).

<sup>21</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1934, Volume 78 Part 5:4938.

referred to Harrison's use of the word "shackle" multiple times in an apparent allusion to Mississippi's 'fascist' racial state. Vandenberg stated, "What is democracy, if it does not involve a few 'shackles,' to use the *tell-tale word* [emphasis added] of the Senator from Mississippi...thus does Mussolini and fascism. Thus does Hitler in Germany."<sup>22</sup>

Mortified by this insinuation, Senator Harrison's colleague from Mississippi, Representative Ross Collins, later that day gave a speech on the floor of the House condemning German anti-Semitism with the intent to distance Mississippi from any fascist connection.<sup>23</sup> It was an unusual speech for Collins, as it did not take place as part of a broader discussion and it was the only time he addressed this topic during his entire tenure in Congress.

Southerners' hesitancy about labelling others as fascists, after they had so long had been negatively identified themselves, was another driver of the South's low participation in the fascist discourse. Personal accusations of fascism aimed at individuals such as President Roosevelt and publisher William Randolph Hearst were largely made by non-southerners. Over ninety percent of fascist slurs against individuals were made by non-southerners during the Seventy-Fifth Congress — a pattern that held for the rest of the decade.<sup>24</sup> Southerners' reluctance to identify others as fascist most likely stemmed from their own long-lived experience of being smeared and the risk of counter-accusations. Overall, these repartees suggest that southern congressmen's reticence in engaging in the discourse on fascism was a result of a sensitivity on the topic brought about by the widespread and persistent claims propagated by their critics that the South represented the epitome of fascism in America. Thus identified, it makes sense that they would endeavour to keep a low profile on this topic especially in light of the too-close-to-ignore parallels in practice between their region and the fascist states.

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<sup>22</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1934, Volume 78 Part 10:10371.

<sup>23</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1934, Volume 78 Part 10:10454.

<sup>24</sup> The one instance of it being deployed by a southerner during 1934-1935 was against Huey Long by one of his political rivals from Louisiana.

### 5.1.2. Affinity

In addition to frequency, *how* the South discussed fascism compared to the non-South was distinctive. The southern delegation's rhetoric around fascism was the most affirmative of any delegation during the 1930s. As fascism began to be discussed more frequently in Congress, the pattern inherent in the southern discourse became more apparent. While the rhetoric from the South regarding fascism started out as highly censorious, it steadily became more positive as the decade progressed. During 1930-1931, when Mussolini was the chief avatar of fascism, the southern delegation was at the forefront of fascist reproach. The entirety of this early castigation on behalf of the South was articulated by Senator James Heflin from Alabama who detested Mussolini as a symbol of global Catholic influence. Heflin was a racist and member of the Ku Klux Klan who served as an architect of the 1901 Alabama constitution that disenfranchised Black Alabamans.<sup>25</sup> He defied the Democratic Party's leadership when he actively campaigned against the Party's 1928 presidential candidate Al Smith, because he was Catholic — the first Catholic to be nominated by a major political party. Addressing a crowd of over 10,000 members of the Klan in Syracuse, New York, Heflin vowed to block Smith's candidacy, so the U.S. presidency did not become, "the tail to the Roman Catholic kite."<sup>26</sup> Heflin's objections to Catholicism ran deeper than a Protestant antipathy. He was outraged by racially integrated Catholic parochial schools and the support shown by some northern Catholics for interracial dances and marriages.<sup>27</sup>

Coincident with his vendetta against Al Smith, Heflin found another target upon which to vent his anti-Catholic spleen: Mussolini. Heflin repeatedly returned to the floor of the Senate throughout 1927-31 to rhetorically eviscerate Mussolini's Italy as a "cruel and murderous" regime that persecuted Protestants and held it up as an example of Catholic run state under the thumb of corrupt leaders — a not so subtle warning to "100% Americans" to reject the pernicious influence of Catholic politicians.<sup>28</sup> Heflin painted

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<sup>25</sup> Auburn University, *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, "J. Thomas Heflin," October 14, 2010.

<sup>26</sup> Arnold Rice, *The Ku Klux Klan in American Politics* (New Jersey: Public Affairs Press, 1962), 89-90.

<sup>27</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1930, Volume 72 Part 3:3239.

<sup>28</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1930, Volume 72 Part 3:2996.

Mussolini as a Catholic dictator, a claim he said was supported by the sealing of the Lateran Pact in 1929 which reconciled the Church with the *Risorgimento* and Fascism. Under this agreement between Pope Pius and Mussolini, the Church gained independent sovereignty of the Holy See in return for recognizing the Italian state and providing Mussolini's regime moral legitimacy. Heflin's intent was clear with his anti-fascist rhetoric: to paint Catholics as a group that was prone to following dangerous totalitarian leaders such as Mussolini and the Pope. While his diatribes against fascism were largely ignored by his colleagues in the Senate, Heflin's efforts marked the first congressional effort to use the discourse of European fascism to shape American politics. Heflin discussed fascism with the intent to suppress the growing influence of Catholics in American politics and to hold the line on the existing racial order in America.<sup>29</sup>

The rhetoric from the South flipped after the Nazis seized power. As fascism became more associated with racial ordering, became an increasingly important constituency that defended the social structures and practices of fascism. The South's favourable rhetoric manifested in two flavours: affirmative or defensive comments about the fascist states, and a relative lack of criticism. During the 1930s, the South was most the over-represented region in the defence of fascism and the most under-represented region in criticizing it, measured both by absolute numbers and on a relative basis to congressional representation (Table 4).

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<sup>29</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1931, Volume 75 Part 7:6693.

**Table 4:**  
**Fascist Related Discourse by Sentiment (1930 – 1939)**

<b>Region</b>	<b>% of Congress</b>	<b>% of Positive or Deflective Conversations</b>	<b>% of Negative Conversations</b>
Northeast	28%	26%	40%
Midwest	32%	26%	23%
South	27%	35%	13%
West	12%	14%	23%

At the beginning of the decade, thanks to Heflin’s anti-Catholic diatribes, the South accounted for the most disapproving commentary of fascist regimes. This position reversed in a dramatic manner when the Seventy-Third Congress convened in March, 1933. As the decade progressed, the southern delegation accounted for an increasingly higher proportion of sympathetic statements. The nature of these positive conversations transformed over the course of the decade, beginning at first, as oblique and deflecting, but later became more openly supportive in direct correlation with the excesses of the fascist regimes.

On March 27, 1933, Jewish Congressman William Sirovich, representing New York’s 14<sup>th</sup> district, proposed a resolution “calling upon the great, noble, human, loving and enterprising people of Germany to stop the cruel and inhuman treatment by their autocrat, Hitler, of the Jewish nationals of Germany.” This resolution was blocked by four congressmen, all southerners. Representative Thomas Blanton from Texas rejected the resolution on the grounds that since there was also racism in America it would be hypocritical to condemn the Germans. Representative Martin Dies Jr. from Texas moved to block the resolution on the grounds that direct criticism from the U.S. Congress would only make things worse for German Jews. Representative Wright Patman from Texas opined that the matter was best left in the hands of the State Department and Congress need not get involved. The fourth southern response was the most incredible. Representative Andrew May from Kentucky asserted German anti-Semitism was actually a benefit for the Jews, asking, “does not the gentleman feel that unjust persecution of any

nation is a real tonic to any generation of any race?"<sup>30</sup> With this exchange, the southern congressmen shielded Nazi Germany from outside pressure and demonstrated that there was a bloc in Congress that was uninterested in condemning fascist practices — two outcomes that no doubt cheered the Nazis as they proceeded to embed the ideals of National Socialism in the German state.

By the mid-1930s, many of the sympathetic and apologist comments expressed by the southern delegation were couched in an isolationist tenor. While the South was by no means a bastion of isolationism — that prize was reserved for the Midwest during the 1930s — it did host some vehement isolationists who made good use of the fascist discourse to promote their views.<sup>31</sup> Representative Blanton from Texas delivered a series of speeches in 1935 that aggressively admonished his fellow congressmen for criticizing the fascist regimes in Italy and Germany. He contended these countries had the right to manage themselves however they desired.<sup>32</sup> This sentiment was not especially unusual among isolationist-minded congressmen and similar conversations were expressed by others, especially Republicans and Midwesterners. If Blanton's comments had gone no further than arguing for America to mind its own business in the name of international peace then he would not be worthy of note. However, Blanton's distinguishing factor was the combination of his pro-fascist isolationist rhetoric along with the vigour he exhibited in steering conversations away from the disparagement of fascism. When in 1934 the House voted to form a special committee to investigate fascism in America, Blanton was one of the most vocal in opposition arguing it was a waste of taxpayers' money.<sup>33</sup> In July 1935 he rebuked Congressman Dickstein for castigating Hitler as "the madman of

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<sup>30</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1933, Volume 77 Part 1:885–887.

<sup>31</sup> Kristin Hoganson in her book *The Heartland*, makes the point that Midwesterners were quite international when it came to commerce and the exchange of farming technology. Isolationism in this context refers to reticence to become involved in the military conflicts of other nations – especially in Europe. While in general Democrats voted consistently against isolationist positions during the interwar years, voting only approximately ten percent of the time in favor, the majority of these isolationist votes were cast by congressmen from the Midwest, while the South only accounted for a small minority, see Kristin Hoganson, *The Heartland: An American History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2019), 194; Ralph H. Smuckler, "The Region of Isolationism," *The American Political Science Review* 47, no. 2 (1953): 401.

<sup>32</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1935, Volume 79 Part 11:11572.

<sup>33</sup> *Jewish Daily Bulletin*, "House Votes Sweeping Anti-Nazi Investigation," March 21, 1934, 1.

Germany.”<sup>34</sup> In March 1936, Blanton objected when congressman Sirovich interpolated negative commentary on the fascist states into a debate on copyright laws.<sup>35</sup>

While southerners, as a group, were the most overrepresented in congressional conversations that approved, defended, or apologized for European fascism, they were not alone. During the mid-1930s some of the most fervent pro-fascist comments by individual congressmen were put forward by non-southerners. Mussolini generally was well thought of and admired by many until the second Italo-Abyssinian War, and was even given an award in 1933 by an association of American Jewish publishers for being one of the world’s twelve “greatest Christian champions” of the Jews.<sup>36</sup> Senator William King from Utah, took to the floor of Congress on January 15, 1934 to praise Mussolini as a great international statesman.<sup>37</sup> In March, Representative Everett Dirksen from Illinois approvingly noted Italy’s rapid economic development under Fascism.<sup>38</sup> Representative James Beck from Pennsylvania lauded Mussolini as a “man of extraordinary ability” and opined that Italy might be quite suited to Fascism.<sup>39</sup> In April, Representative Sirovich, who was Jewish, applauded Mussolini for transforming “Italy into a closely united nation...[he] rescued her people from poverty, restored all her production of materials and farming — nay, raised them to a higher plan than they ever occupied.”<sup>40</sup>

Even Hitler was praised on the floor of Congress. Soon after Hitler ascended to the Chancellorship, Representatives Charles Bakewell and James Beck from Connecticut and Pennsylvania respectively, asserted that Hitler was the German people’s logical response to the flawed Treaty of Versailles.<sup>41</sup> In May, Representative John Hoeppel from California noted that Hitler’s election reflected the democratic will of the German people. Representative Hamilton Fish from New York welcomed Hitler as a bulwark against

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<sup>34</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1935, Volume 79 Part 11:11863.

<sup>35</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1936, Volume 80 Part 3:3183.

<sup>36</sup> Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*, 40.

<sup>37</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1934, Volume 78 Part 4:3465.

<sup>38</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1934, Volume 78 Part 4:3849.

<sup>39</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1934, Volume 78 Part 5:5363.

<sup>40</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1934, Volume 78 Part 7:7233.

<sup>41</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1933, Volume 77 Part 2:1749-1755.



Bolshevism. Hitler's most vocal cheerleader was Representative Terry Carpenter from Nebraska. Claiming to speak on behalf of Nebraska's 750,000 ethnic Germans, Carpentered stated, "Hitler has done a great amount of good for the people of Germany."<sup>42</sup> In June, he went further with his approbation saying, "I must confess I have a great deal of admiration for the dictatorship of Mr. Hitler...his methods have been drastic but thorough, and he has succeeded."<sup>43</sup> Carpenter's effusive adulation of the Nazi state provoked a reaction from Representative Martin Sweeney from Ohio who retorted, "[it should be] the concern of every citizen when human beings are subjected to physical torture and punishment, simply because they happen to be of a different race..."<sup>44</sup>

These positive comments from other delegations are distinguished from those of the South insofar that they occurred before the less savoury aspects of fascism began to outshine the glow of orderliness brought about by these regimes. Conversely, the southern delegation began to express itself more frequently in favour as the decade progressed and the illiberal practices of the fascist regimes became more evident. A number of southern politicians made open expressions of support in 1937 and thereafter. Senator Josiah Bailey from North Carolina declared, "They [Mussolini and Hitler] mean well."<sup>45</sup> Kentucky Congressman John Robsion spoke favourable about the *Anschluss* given the enthusiastic response of the Austrian people.<sup>46</sup> Arch-segregationist Senator Theodore Bilbo of Mississippi praised Mussolini for implementing policies that reinvigorated and advanced Italian industry, and declared "what Mississippi needs today is a Mussolini."<sup>47</sup> He also approvingly noted the similarity between the Hitler's treatment of the Jews and the South's treatment of African Americans, noting "it is beginning to be recognized by the thoughtful minds of the age that the conservation of racial values is the

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<sup>42</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1934, Volume 78 Part 5:4943.

<sup>43</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1934, Volume 78 Part 11:12279.

<sup>44</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1934, Volume 78 Part 5:4944.

<sup>45</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1937, Volume 81 Part 6:7097.

<sup>46</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1938, Volume 83 Part 3:3502.

<sup>47</sup> Hilton Butler, "Bilbo—the Two-Edged Sword: A Mussolini for Our Most Backward State," *North American Review* (December 1931): 496-503.

only hope for future civilization.”<sup>48</sup> Others dismissed concerns about European fascism because they thought the reporting was inaccurate and misleading; or even if it was true it did not matter. Congressman Maury Maverick from Texas compared the allegations against Hitler to the propaganda disseminated about the Kaiser before the First World War by scheming internationalists.<sup>49</sup> Considering the situation pragmatically, Congressman John Rankin from Mississippi expressed that it was unproductive to criticize Mussolini and Hitler because it was just a fact that dictators ran the world.<sup>50</sup>

The chief southern protagonist who spoke positively about fascism during this period was Senator Bob Reynolds from North Carolina. A senator since 1932, Reynolds did not say much about fascism prior to joining to the powerful Foreign Relations Committee in 1939. His previous comments were as likely to be pro-fascist (Mussolini was a hero for saving Italy from communism) as anti-fascist (fascism was a threat to American hegemony in South America).<sup>51</sup> Reynolds’s rhetoric shifted significantly in the winter of 1938 after he returned from an extended trip to Europe during which he visited fourteen countries including Germany and Italy. The purpose of the trip, according to Reynolds, was to bypass the misinformation being peddled by the press for the purposes of ginning up irrational hatred and to get the true story of what was going on in Europe in order to educate his fellow Americans.<sup>52</sup> Deeply impressed with what he saw, Reynolds returned back to the United States with an evangelical spirit for fascism. Through a series of speeches, radio interviews, and articles he enthusiastically praised and defended Mussolini and Hitler during the early months of 1939.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1938, Volume 83 Part 7:7359-7362.

<sup>49</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1938, Volume 83 Part 3:2393, 3331.

<sup>50</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1938, Volume 84 Part 4:4116.

<sup>51</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1938, Volume 83 Part 1:91, 375.

<sup>52</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1939, Volume 84 Part 1:367, 748.

<sup>53</sup> A significantly different outcome compared to fellow southern Thomas Wolfe’s sojourn to Nazi Germany. Wolfe, a staunch anti-Semite and supporter of the southern racial state, was an avid Germanophile and sometime admirer of fascism up to his visit of Germany in 1936 (one of many trips he made to Germany including one in 1935). Wolfe documented his change of view in a novella, “I Have a Thing to Tell You” that was originally serialized in the *New Republic* in March 1937, and led to his work being banned in the Reich. The novella was later included as a chapter in his posthumously published book *You Can’t Go Home Again* (1947).

Interviewed by reporters upon his return, Reynold's painted a rosy picture of Germany and Italy as prosperous countries filled with contented citizens.<sup>54</sup> Later he encouraged America to be more like Nazi Germany saying, "What is Hitler doing? He is looking after the people of Germany. What ought Uncle Sam do?"<sup>55</sup> He praised fascist economic policies for underpinning vibrant economic growth and eliminating unemployment. He lauded the Nazis for their rehabilitation of German industry including the construction of the autobahns, "the finest highways in the world," and the Italians for reclaiming "hundreds of thousands of acres of [unproductive] land" and revitalizing their mining sector.<sup>56</sup> Further, he hailed the effectiveness of German and Italian trade policies and the cooperation between the two nations saying that their approach was taking "them places."<sup>57</sup>

Only two months after the well-published events of the *Kristallnacht*, Reynolds took to the floor of Congress to question the veracity of stories being disseminated about the Nazi racial state. In a January 1939 speech he began with, "*If* [emphasis added] there are minorities in Germany being persecuted by Hitler and the German Government..."<sup>58</sup> Expanding on this sentiment at a later date, Reynolds argued that even if there was racial oppression, it was the norm in Central and Eastern Europe and that America had no business interfering with the internal affairs of other nations.<sup>59</sup> He went on to reassure his colleagues in the Senate that Hitler was sated in his desire for additional territorial acquisition post Sudetenland and was now focused on peacefully competing via global trade. He rationalized fascist militarism as analogous to British and French imperialism and even America's treatment of its Native Americans, while stridently arguing that the fascist states posed no threat to the existing world order.<sup>60</sup> Reynolds concluded his January 1939 paean to the fascist states by demanding that the United States resume full

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<sup>54</sup> *New York Times*, December 24, 1938, 6.

<sup>55</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1939, Volume 84 Part 1:749.

<sup>56</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1939, Volume 84 Part 1:746, 756.

<sup>57</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1939, Volume 84 Part 1:377.

<sup>58</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1939, Volume 84 Part 1:367.

<sup>59</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1939, Volume 84 Part 1:751.

<sup>60</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1939, Volume 84 Part 1:754.

diplomatic and economic relations Nazi Germany. He argued that trade has nothing to do with liking a country's values but rather the opportunity for economic gain and that America's diplomatic actions towards Nazi Germany were inconsistent with its treatment of other countries.<sup>61</sup> When challenged by a fellow senator on the role of concentration camps in the Nazi order, Reynolds downplayed their existence and equated them to the prison system in the United States. He later argued for the benefit of having concentration camps in the United States to deal with its political radicals.<sup>62</sup>

There was a transnational dimension to Reynold's speeches as they had the effect of encouraging European fascists. Hitler reportedly was delighted with Reynolds pro-fascist speeches given on the floor the Senate.<sup>63</sup> After his trip to Germany, Reynolds began to appear more frequently in the flagship National Socialist newspaper, *Völkischer Beobachter*. The paper provided extensive coverage of Reynold's pro-fascist statements in the article, "U.S. Senator turns against anti-German agitation after a trip to Germany."<sup>64</sup> In February, the paper published an article penned by Reynolds in which he defended Nazi Germany and highlighted the danger of communism.<sup>65</sup> Later that month, the *Völkischer* quoted Reynolds pointing out that of "all the so-called 'aggressor nations' England was the biggest and bloodiest."<sup>66</sup>

Subsequent to his initial salvo of January speeches, Reynolds took to the floor of the Senate on five additional occasions over the next four months to voice further admiration and support for the fascist states. In February, he stridently contended that the fascist states were perceived poorly because of communist influence in American media. He claimed that communist sympathizing journalists upbraided fascism as a smokescreen to "distract the mind of the American people away from the reptile itself, the reptile of

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<sup>61</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1939, Volume 84 Part 1:377, 750.

<sup>62</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1939, Volume 84 Part 1:746-748.

<sup>63</sup> Drew Pearson and Robert S. Allen, *Washington Merry-Go-Round*, April 11, 1939, 1.

<sup>64</sup> *Völkischer Beobachter*, December 25/26, 1938, 5.

<sup>65</sup> Julian Pleasants, *Buncombe Bob: The Life and Times of Robert Rice Reynolds* (University of North Carolina, 2000), 142.

<sup>66</sup> *Völkischer Beobachter*, February 23, 1939, 4.

communism.”<sup>67</sup> Over and over Reynolds came to the floor to make this point: the negative propaganda being spread about fascism was nothing other than a tactic used by communists to cover their own crimes and nefarious schemes.<sup>68</sup> He also argued that the fascist states’ militarism was justified by the overly punitive Versailles Treaty and was equivalent to nineteenth century British imperialism. Pointedly, Reynolds repeated the Nazi claim that its militarism was necessary to reclaim what had been stolen from Germany “unlawfully, illegally, improperly, and immorally.”<sup>69</sup> During an exchange with Henry Stimson, the Secretary of War, during a Foreign Relations Committee meeting in April 1939, Reynolds favourably compared fascist militarism to British and French imperialism and America’s treatment of Native Americans.”<sup>70</sup> The denouement of Reynolds’ apologist rhetoric came in the wake of Germany’s occupation of Czechoslovakia. Reynolds trivialized the takeover by comparing to how southerners settled land disputes, pronouncing “Hitler went over and took land in the way that sometimes the boys in Texas and in North Carolina used to move a fence with the aid of shotgun, instead of doing it legally by way of the surveyor — that is all that Hitler did.” The presiding President of the Senate, apparently horrified by the analogy, interrupted Reynolds and asked him how much longer he planned to go on.<sup>71</sup>

Reynolds’ logic and language in defence of fascism was not idiosyncratic as it mirrored aspects of that presented by fascist sympathizers in western Europe. Like Reynolds, The British Union of Fascists (BUF) highlighted fascism’s apparent effectiveness in ameliorating the economic problems of the Great Depression and stressed the importance of good relations with the fascist states as part an anti-war and peace stance. The BUF urged good relations between the liberal democracies and fascist Europe in an appeal to the universal brotherhood of “white civilization.”<sup>72</sup> French fascists

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<sup>67</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1939, Volume 84 Part 1:377, 1023.

<sup>68</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1939, Volume 84 Part 2:1828, 1933.

<sup>69</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1939, Volume 84 Part 2:1680.

<sup>70</sup> Pleasants, *Buncombe Bob*, 151-152.

<sup>71</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1939, Volume 84 Part 4:4228.

<sup>72</sup> Gareth Thompson, “The Propaganda of Universal Fascism: Peace, Empire, and International Co-operation in British Union of Fascists’ publicity from 1932 to 1939,” *Corporate Communications*, 2020-07-16, Vol.25 (4), 580-581.

such as the *Faisceau* and the *Croix de Feu* also presented fascist policies as tonic for national renewal.<sup>73</sup> While Reynolds shared in the anti-Semitism of his European counterparts, it was not otherwise generally a significant part of southern discourse during the interwar period.

Reynolds' pro-fascist rhetoric generated a tremendous amount of blowback. A mainstream daily Washington political publication reported that his Senate colleagues now referred to Reynolds privately as the "Tar Heel Fuehrer" and claimed that Reynolds was propagandizing for his "Nazi friends."<sup>74</sup> One of Reynolds colleagues was quoted, "I would object to any referendum that the Senator from North Carolina is for" — a serious rebuke — given the tradition of decorum among senators.<sup>75</sup> The local papers in North Carolina began editorializing against Reynolds, one opining, "North Carolinians are seeing their junior Senator become more and more tarred with the unfavourable publicity in which the Tar Heel solon is pictured, time and again, as a pro-Nazi."<sup>76</sup> Elites in the North Carolina Democratic Party pressured Reynolds to soften his language.<sup>77</sup>

Surprised at the degree of pushback he received, Reynolds was furious at the criticism but realized that he had driven himself into a political ditch with his speeches and knew he had to challenge the allegations that he was a Nazi sympathizer, saying, "for if I do not answer them, I will be destroyed."<sup>78</sup> He responded with a two-hour diatribe on the floor of the Senate on May 11, 1939 lashing out against the press and his detractors. He attacked his chief nemeses, Drew Pearson and Robert S. Allen, the editors of the Washington political publication, *Washington Merry-Go-Round*, as dishonest journalists with an anti-southern bias, and presented a long list of southern politicians they derided as evidence. He contended they were in league with communist interests that were determined to drag America into another overseas war. In spite of this effort, the damage

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<sup>73</sup> Kalman, *The Extreme Right in Interwar France*, 10, 187.

<sup>74</sup> *Washington Merry-Go-Round*, January 18, 1939, 4; *Washington Merry-Go-Round*, January 24, 1939, 4.

<sup>75</sup> *Washington Merry-Go-Round*, April 27, 1939, 3.

<sup>76</sup> Editorial, *Daily Times-News*, Burlington, N.C., May 14, 1939, 2.

<sup>77</sup> Pleasants, *Buncombe Bob*, 153.

<sup>78</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1939, Volume 84 Part 5:5416.

was done and Reynolds realized it, and he soon thereafter ended his panegyrics on fascism, and contented himself with grumbling in a few follow-up speeches about how any red-blooded American was bound to be labelled a fascist by the press.<sup>79</sup>

What was Reynolds' motivation in full-court pressing a pro-fascist discourse in 1939 and what did it have to do with the South? His detractors implied treason and avariciousness as the impetus for his "Nazi activities."<sup>80</sup> One source claimed that Reynolds was "wined, dined and flattered by the Goering-Goebbels clique" during his trip to Europe and that his desire to be appointed to the Senate Foreign Relations committee was motivated by a desire to help the Nazis.<sup>81</sup> Another account suggested that Reynolds was profiting by increased sales of his newspaper, *The Vindicator*.<sup>82</sup> Collectively, these accusations implied that at best, he had been hoodwinked by the flattery and attention he received while in the Reich, and at worst, had become a de facto paid representative of the Nazi government.<sup>83</sup> Reynolds categorically denied these accusations asserting that his only motivation was American patriotism.

Reynolds' side hustles provide a clue regarding the impetus for his rhetoric and actions. In January 1939, he formed the Vindicators Association, an ultra-nationalist, isolationist, nativist, anti-Semitic, and anti-communist organization that published *The Vindicator* to spread his opinions. Members of the Vindicators were dedicated to keeping out undesirable immigrants such as Jews. They argued that Jews were disproportionately influential in the United States given their number, and the best policy was to shut the door on them. Reynolds had futilely worked to push this policy through legislation as co-author of the Reynolds-Starnes Bill in 1936 that called for cutting immigration quotas by ninety percent beyond the already reduced 1924 levels. As chief "Vindicator," Reynolds encouraged members to create their own border patrol units, wear badges covered with

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<sup>79</sup> Similar to the sentiment expressed by famed publisher William Randolph Hearst.

<sup>80</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1939, Volume 84 Part 5:5415.

<sup>81</sup> *Washington Merry-Go-Round*, January 18, 1939, 4.

<sup>82</sup> *Daily Press*, Newport News, Virginia, May 4, 1939, 4.

<sup>83</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1939, Volume 84 Part 5:5416.

the stars and stripes, and establish a \$20 prize for those who captured “alien crooks.”<sup>84</sup> Reynolds was also part owner of another newspaper, the anti-Semitic *The Defender*.<sup>85</sup> Given his views on race and economic nationalism it was no surprise that Reynolds was drawn to the ideology of fascism. Reynolds’ pro-fascist discourse in the Senate can be credibly explained by the fact that he was a true believer in many of the practices of fascism. Reynolds utilized the discourse of fascism in an attempt to swing U.S. foreign policy away from the liberal democracies to the fascist regimes and relied upon southern social structures favourably disposed to the practices of fascism to shield him politically.

The historiography is mixed in its interpretation of Reynolds’ apparent pro-fascist agenda.<sup>86</sup> His most recent biographer, Julian Pleasants, argued that it was a mistake to consider Reynolds pro-fascist and that his behaviour was better classified an offshoot of southern demagogic isolationism.<sup>87</sup> Pleasants’ thesis rests upon shaky ground. Reynolds’ rhetoric was an outlier even when considered against other prominent isolations like Senator Gerald Nye and Congressman Hamilton Fish, or even his southern counterparts like Congressmen Martin Dies Jr. and John Rankin. The conclusions developed in this dissertation turn the shaky ground upon which Pleasants rested his argument into a yawning chasm. His contention that Reynolds’ words were more about vote getting demagoguery than fascist inclination is undermined when considered within the wider context of the South’s distinctive connections to and southern politicians’ defence of European fascism. While Reynolds was the most egregious example of southern pro-fascist sentiment his was not a lone voice. Southern congressmen defended European fascism with more vigour than any other delegation as indicated by both the absolute number of statements and as relative percentage to their numbers. Lest this finding be considered idiosyncratic, the next section details how the southern delegation was also the most underrepresented in the criticism of fascist Europe.

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<sup>84</sup> Pleasants, *Buncombe Bob*, 164.

<sup>85</sup> Charles Higham, *American Swastika* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1985), 52.

<sup>86</sup> Ray Arsenault in “The Folklore of Southern Demagoguery” and Michie and Ryhlick in *Dixie Demagogues* argued that Reynolds was for all intents a fascist, see Raymond Arsenault and George Wright, “The Folklore of Southern Demagoguery,” 119-120; Allan Michie and Frank Ryhlick, *Dixie Demagogues* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1939), 241.

<sup>87</sup> Pleasants, *Buncombe Bob*, 3, 140-141.



### 5.1.3. Condemnation

The other dimension of the southern congressional delegation's sympathetic discourse on fascism was how infrequently its members engaged in discussions that explicitly criticized fascism and the fascist regimes. Holding twenty-seven percent of Congress, the southern delegation only generated thirteen percent of the conversations that explicitly condemned fascism. This represented the lowest of any region, measured both by absolute number and on a relative basis (Table 4) — a glaring statistical anomaly that set the South apart from the rest of the United States.

By far the most vocal critic of European fascism during the 1930s was Congressman Sam Dickstein from New York, a Lithuanian Jew that had immigrated to the United States as a child. During the Seventy-Third Congress (1933-1934), Dickstein pressed for an investigation of the “destructive, subversive propaganda originating from foreign countries.” His efforts contributed to establishment of the McCormack-Dickstein Committee that was commissioned to investigate communist and fascist influences in America. During this time, Dickstein professed equal disgust with both communism and fascism, stating, “Personally, I can see no distinction between communism and fascism...although the two movements might fight each other strenuously, is merely that as between tweedle-dee and tweedle-dum.”<sup>88</sup> Correspondingly, the McCormack-Dickstein Committee made an extensive investigation into the influence of communist as well fascist propaganda in the United States.

Dickstein shifted to a decidedly less neutral and more anti-fascist position during the 75th Congress (1937-38), where he engaged in repeated and voluble diatribes against European fascism. Concurrent with this shift, Dickstein became a paid agent of the Soviet secret police, the NKVD. Dickstein approached the NKVD in late 1937 with an offer to provide influence for payment. After approximately six months of negotiations over the services to be provided and payment amounts, Dickstein was formally put on the payroll of the NKVD in May of 1938, becoming the only known congressman in the history of the United States to become a paid agent for a foreign power. In exchange for \$1,250 per

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<sup>88</sup> Radio Address of Hon. Samuel Dickstein, October 28, 1933, U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1934, Volume 78 Part 1:1030.

month, Dickstein committed to steer Congress' attention away from the threat of communism and towards fascism.<sup>89</sup>

During of the 75<sup>th</sup> Congress Dickstein delivered string of twenty-three speeches over the course of eighteen months that derided European fascism and called for a new congressional investigation into Nazi activities in the United States. Now downplaying the threat of communism, he declared to his fellow congressmen, "I'm not so worried about the Communists as I am about the Fascists. I can handle the Communists."<sup>90</sup> It is possible that Dickstein's Jewish background in combination with increasing anti-Semitism in fascist Europe may have contributed to his change of focus, although he denied it asserting, "I am really surprised at my colleague bringing in the Jewish question...My presentation of these Un-American activities has been purely and solely based upon Americanism."<sup>91</sup>

Dickstein's persistence paid off in 1938 when the House authorized another special investigation to be carried out by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). Unfortunately for Dickstein, he was passed over for the chairmanship and even membership by the House leadership. The chairmanship instead went to conservative Martin Dies Jr. of Texas. Disappointed by his failure to secure this influential position, the Soviets soon tired of paying Dickstein, who they codenamed "Crook," and cut him off about a year later.<sup>92</sup> Thereafter, the number of speeches Dickstein gave decrying fascism diminished significantly. Dickstein engaged in the discourse of fascism, motivated, at least partially, to earn illicit profits through influence peddling as a congressman. In a cruel twist of irony, the committee Dickstein helped create as a paid Soviet agent expended the greater part of its authority and resources to investigate communist influence in America and did very little with fascism under the helm of southerner Martin Dies (a detailed discussion of Congressman Dies and the HUAC is presented in Chapter 6). Of course, there were many non-corrupt congressmen from

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<sup>89</sup> Weinstein, Allen and Alexander Vassiliev, *The Haunted Wood: Soviet Espionage in America — the Stalin Era* (New York: Random House, 2000), 143.

<sup>90</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, April 21, 1938, Volume 83 Part 6:5678.

<sup>91</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1938, Volume 83 Part 1:483.

<sup>92</sup> Allen and Vassiliev, *The Haunted Wood*, 142

outside the South that voiced legitimate grievances about both fascist ideology and practice, including anti-Semitism, fascist militarism, and the threat of ‘fifth column’ fascist activity in America (Table 5).

**Table 5:  
Top Five Categories: Negative Comments about Fascism by Region**

<b>Topics</b>	<b>Northeast</b>	<b>Midwest</b>	<b>South</b>	<b>West</b>	<b>Total</b>
Anti-Semitism	29	9	5	11	54
Militarism	5	17	4	8	34
Internal Threat to U.S.	23	2	0	1	26
Dictatorship	9	3	0	6	18
Individual Rights	3	4	8	1	16

Southerners prioritized their concerns differently. When discussing fascism as a system of government, they distinguished themselves by focusing on its propensity to infringe on individual rights, while non-southern congressmen were more likely to criticize it as an anti-modern form of government that fostered racism and threatened world peace. Southerners’ proclivity to focus on individual liberties is a wonderful example of confirmation bias in action. Indicatively, Senator Bailey from North Carolina exclaimed, “what is the heart of it [fascism]? Mussolini says, away with liberty! Away with individual rights! The state is supreme.”<sup>93</sup> Fed up with the intrusiveness of the burgeoning federal bureaucracy under the New Deal, southerners found that European fascism served as a ready-made strawman around which they could advocate for small central government and states’ rights.

Southern congressmen were also far less interested in discussing racial persecution and violence in the fascist states. Decrying the subversion of democracy in fascist Europe was another topic that received short shrift from the southern delegation — not surprisingly given southern policies that disenfranchised broad swathes of the region’s lower income and minority populations. Southerners’ lack of concern regarding fifth-column fascist activity in the country is explained by the fact that their region hosted

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<sup>93</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1935, Volume 79 Part 10:11386.

relatively few individuals who belonged to fascistic organizations as compared to other regions (see Chapter 4).

The southern congressional delegation's discourse demonstrates that there was a distinct southern political response to European fascism. The reticence of the region's representatives to participate in these conversations was a function of the widespread allegations of southern fascism. When southern congressmen did engage, they did so in a way that was distinct and in support of traditional southern cultural values. The southern delegation's political response was the most supportive and least critical compared to any other region. True to the traditional southern embrace of individual liberties and states' rights, southern congressmen filtered their understanding of fascism through the lens of these principles. Normally reticent on the topic, they became fully engaged when it suited their agenda to rail against high-handed central government. In the parlance of finance, southern congressmen 'talked their own book' when they engaged in the discourse of fascism. A drill-down by topic in the following sections unveils the specific domestic and foreign policy impacts.

## **5.2. Racial Discourse: Nazi Anti-Semitism and Mussolini's War in Ethiopia**

When non-southern congressmen rose to vociferously condemn racial discrimination in Germany, the southern delegation was almost totally silent. Between 1933 and 1934, ninety-three percent of the protests regarding the treatment of German Jews were made by congressmen from outside the South, establishing a trend that played out over the rest of the decade. During the course of the 1930s, southern congressmen differentiated themselves by their relative taciturnity, uttering the fewest condemnations of anti-Semitism of any regional delegation (Table 5). The South's reticence can be attributed to the relatively few Jewish-Americans that resided in the South (only about five percent) combined with the fact that southern Jews tended to be quiescent on racial matters during the interwar period.<sup>94</sup> Additionally, southern congressmen likely kept a

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<sup>94</sup> "Statistics of the Jews – 1929," *American Jewish Year Book Vol. 32* (1930-1931), edited by Harry Schneiderman, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America), 220.

low profile on this topic because of similarities between the racial prohibitions in their region and fascist Europe.

While critical comments about racial discrimination from the southern delegation were few and far between, one that stands out was made in 1933 by Senate Majority Leader Joe Robinson from Arkansas. Robinson excoriated the German people for acquiescing to Nazi practices that resulted in cruelty to those of Jewish blood.<sup>95</sup> Sparked by Robinson's condemnation five other senators rose to speak out against the emerging Nazi racial state on the Senate floor that same day in 1933, however, none of them were southerners. It was not the first time Robinson bucked his southern base. During the 1924 presidential election Robinson attracted the lampoons of some of his fellow southerners when he vocally supported Catholic candidate Al Smith for the office of Vice President. Robinson admonished Alabama senator Heflin for his attacks on Smith's Catholic faith, arguing that religious affiliation should have no bearing on a person's credentials for higher office.<sup>96</sup> Robinson's vocal anti-Semitism may have also been motivated by his close alliance with Roosevelt and his advisors, a record number who were Jewish.<sup>97</sup> Whatever the impetus, his denunciation of anti-Semitism was certainly an outlier for a southern politician during the interwar period. It did however represent the first datapoint of trend the played out over the following decades. As the interwar period progressed, Southern politicians of *national* stature increasingly spoke negatively about fascism, while *regional* southern politicians were supportive. Despite Robinson's example, southern congressmen were the least critical of any regional delegation when it came to fascist related anti-Semitism.

The southern delegation's apparent indifference to fascist related racism was not only evidenced by its lack of expressed opprobrium, but also by the disproportionate number of conversations that either deflected criticism away from or defended anti-Semitism. As mentioned previously, in March 1933, four southern congressmen blocked

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<sup>95</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1933, Volume 77 Part 6:5538

<sup>96</sup> U.S. Senate Historian, "Joseph T. Robinson: The "Fightingest" Man in the U.S. Senate."

<sup>97</sup> Richard Breitman and Allen Lichtman, *Roosevelt and the Jews* (Harvard University Press, 2013), 25-40; *The Jewish Press*, "The Jews and Roosevelt," November 14, 2021; Leonard Dinnerstein, "The Presidents & the Jews," *Reform Judaism* (January 2000).

a resolution calling for Congress to condemn Nazi Germany for passing the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service that stipulated that ‘non-Aryans’ were to retire or be dismissed from civil service jobs as well as related decrees that put prohibitions on Jewish physicians, teachers, and students.<sup>98</sup> They were the only voices of dissent. Other southern politicians expressed similar sentiments. Speaking in 1937, Representative Robertson from Virginia indicated that Nazi anti-Semitism was a matter of racial hygiene, and celebrated the fact that America had been blessed with settlers of Northern European descent.<sup>99</sup> Senator Bilbo from Mississippi favourably noted the comparable treatment of “Negroes” in the South with Jews in Germany. He defended the dual persecutions as a defensive racial move saying, “the impoverishment of race values contributes more to the impairment and destruction of civilization than any other agency.”<sup>100</sup>

While as a group, the southern delegation was the least critical of fascist anti-Semitism, the loudest individual anti-Semitic voices came from outside the South. On June 15, 1933, Congressman Louis McFadden of Pennsylvania dismissed reports of anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany. McFadden stated, “There is no real persecution of Jews in Germany, but there has been a pretended persecution of them because there are 200,000 unwanted Communistic Jews in Germany.”<sup>101</sup> The next year, McFadden once again took to the floor to highlight the outsized influence of Jews in the Bolshevist movement.<sup>102</sup> This rhetoric earned McFadden the praise of American fascist groups such as the Silver Shirts who quoted him extensively in their publications in support of Adolf Hitler.<sup>103</sup>

After McFadden lost his bid for re-election as a result of trying to impeach his fellow Republican Herbert Hoover in 1932, Representative Thorkelson from Montana became the leading voice of anti-Semitism in Congress. In 1939, he argued that the

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<sup>98</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1933, Volume 77 Part 1:885–887.

<sup>99</sup> *Congressional Record*, 1937, Volume 81 Part 5:5555.

<sup>100</sup> *Congressional Record*, 1938, Volume 83 Part 7:7361.

<sup>101</sup> *Congressional Record*, 1933, Volume 77 Part 6:6226.

<sup>102</sup> *Congressional Record*, 1934, Volume 78 Part 11:11843.

<sup>103</sup> *Washington Merry-Go-Round*, January 25, 1934, 4.

fascist states had been unfairly smeared in the court of public opinion as dangerous, militaristic, and anti-democratic because they dared to take on the Jews who were responsible for funding the global communist movement.<sup>104</sup> It is worth noting the idea of Jewish-Bolshevism, or that Jewish intelligentsia was the driving force behind Bolshevism, was a mainstream concept during the interwar period. Winston Churchill, who was a great admirer of and a friend to the Jews throughout his political career, was convinced of the idea of Jewish-Bolshevism.<sup>105</sup> President Wilson concurred with Churchill stating, “the Bolshevik movement had been led by Jews.”<sup>106</sup> David R. Francis, U.S. ambassador to Russia, warned in a 1918 dispatch to Washington D.C. that “the Bolshevik leaders here, most of whom are Jews...care little for Russia or any other country but are internationalists and they are trying to start a worldwide social revolution.”<sup>107</sup> The role of Jews in the Bolshevik movement continues to be debated.<sup>108</sup>

The southern delegation’s attitude towards fascism impacted public policy when it came to domestic security. In 1934, House Resolution 198 called for the establishment of the Special House Committee on Un-American Activities (McCormack-Dickstein Committee) to investigate alleged Nazi funded propaganda being disseminated in the

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<sup>104</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1939, Volume 84 Part 4:4253.

<sup>105</sup> “There is no need to exaggerate the part played (by Jews) in the creation of Bolshevism and in the actual bringing about of the Russian Revolution...it is certainly a very great one; it probably outweighs all others”. He goes on to state that “the majority of leading figures are Jews” and that the part played by the Jews in proportion to their numbers in the Russian population is “astonishing,” see Winston Churchill, “Zionism versus Bolshevism: A struggle for the Soul of the Jewish People,” *Illustrated Sunday Morning Herald* (February 8, 1920): 5.

<sup>106</sup> Frankel, “An Exceptional Hatred?” 212.

<sup>107</sup> David R. Francis, *Russia from the American Embassy, April, 1916-November, 1918* (Cornell University Library, [1921] 2009), 214.

<sup>108</sup> Jewish historian Yuri Slezkine of Berkeley University in his book *The Jewish Century* described the degree to which Jewish intellectuals fostered Bolshevism. Slezkine found that while Jews only represented about four percent of the Russian population at the time of the Bolshevik Revolution, they filled a significant percentage of the important Bolshevik and Soviet leadership positions. The book was the winner of the National Jewish Book Award in the Eastern European Studies by the Jewish Book Council, see Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 105; Paul Hanebrink, agreed that Jewish intellectuals played an outsized leadership role in many Bolshevik movements during the interwar period, but rejected the idea of ‘Judeo-Bolshevism,’ since the wider Jewish population was not over-represented in its support of Bolshevism, see Paul Hanebrink, *A Specter Haunting Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 11-23.

United States. The resolution passed 168 to 31.<sup>109</sup> The voting occurred by ‘division’ and thus there is no record of vote by representative to enable an exact analysis.<sup>110</sup> However, the debate among representatives on the floor of the House is illustrative. The New York delegation strongly supported passage, while the midwestern and southern delegations voiced concern that the investigation would tarnish the image of the German-Americans by associating them with fascism. Racial demographics offer a clue as to these regional positions. In 1930, the state of New York was by a significant margin home to the largest number of Jews in the United States and Jewish congressman Samuel Dickstein representing New York’s Twelfth District was one of the leading proponents of the Committee.<sup>111</sup> Texas and the Midwest on the other hand, hosted relatively few Jews but contained large populations of immigrant and American-born ethnic Germans.<sup>112</sup> The regional appetite to chase domestic fascists was thus negatively correlated with its ratio of ethnic Germans-to-Jews.

While southerners, in general, were not eager to expatiate on racism in fascist Europe, some did use the example to argue for the merits of the South’s racial state. Senator Bilbo contended that southerners should be commended for treating its Black population better than the Nazis treated the Jews.<sup>113</sup> He further reasoned that the fascist example supported his pet idea to deport all African Americans back to Africa in two ways. First, he believed that exile represented a far more humane approach in dealing with troublesome minorities than the eugenic-informed alternatives that were being played out in Germany and Italy. Second, he contended that a mass of Black refugees

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<sup>109</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1934, Volume 78 Part 5:4949.

<sup>110</sup> In the House, there are four forms of votes: voice vote, division vote, yea and nay vote, and recorded vote. Under the division voting process voting is indicated by standing. Only vote totals are announced in this method of voting, see Congressional Research Services, *House Voting Procedures: Forms and Requirements*, February 6, 2019.

<sup>111</sup> *American Jewish Year Book Vol. 34 1932-1933*, 245.

<sup>112</sup> *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, U.S. Department of Commerce (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1933), 43.

<sup>113</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1938, Volume 83 Part 7:7359-7362.



exported back to Africa would serve America's strategic interests by serving as a bulwark against the spread of fascism on that continent.<sup>114</sup>

A peculiarity emerged in the congressional discourse after Mussolini's invaded Ethiopia. Non-southern congressmen spoke about Italy's invasion of Ethiopia as an attack on a state, while only southerners, reflecting the racial paternalism resident in their home region, spoke about the impact on Ethiopians as individuals. Representative Colmer from Mississippi stated, "militaristic Italy, under the domination of war lord, Mussolini...is running over a weaker and almost defenceless black people in Ethiopia."<sup>115</sup> Senator Reynolds from North Carolina also played on this theme lamenting the "poor unarmed blacks" who suffered in Ethiopia.<sup>116</sup> The subtext of Colmer and Reynold's comments can be understood as an implicit justification of Jim Crow: "weaker" Black people are not ready for participation in the wider world and thus must be protected under the paternalistic system of segregation. Inherent in this argument was a defence of the southern racial state: Black people may be second-class citizens in the South but at least they were not being murdered wholesale like under fascism. Southern politicians also adroitly presented fascism as a like-minded example when it suited their purposes. Senator Reynolds noted approvingly that the Italian Fascist government was directing the Black workers in conquered Ethiopia to the task of raising cotton reminiscent of the South.<sup>117</sup> He intimated that Italian rule would be a blessing to the Ethiopians, as Italians would be more intelligent stewards the land — a parallel to the southern social structure that placed the African Americans as workers rather than owners.<sup>118</sup>

The southern delegation's political response to racism in the fascist states was fully aligned with the South's social and racial structures. With few exceptions, southern congressmen overwhelmingly used the discourse of fascism to defend and justify the

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<sup>114</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1939, Volume 84 Part 5:4653-4676.

<sup>115</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1936, Volume 80 Part 4:4054.

<sup>116</sup> Reynolds claimed to greatly care about the injustices heaped upon racial minorities by the fascist and communist totalitarian states around the world listing them off one-by-one, but never mentioning the Jim Crowed Black people of his own region — either a purposeful exclusion or a cultural blind spot as a son of the South, see *Congressional Record*, 1939, Volume 84 Part 1:747.

<sup>117</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1937, Volume 82 Part 2:1159.

<sup>118</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1938, Volume 83 Part 1:91.

racial practices of their home region. They responded to the persecution of Jews in Europe with indifference, a position underpinned by the South's high ratio of ethnic Germans-to-Jews, and highlighted the plight of Black Ethiopians being slaughtered by Italian troops as evidence of the humanness of the southern racial state. More broadly, while southerners were restrained in their discussion of racial discrimination under fascism because the fascist allegation levelled against their home region opened them up charges of hypocrisy, they were less bothered by the practices of European fascism given the simpatico social structures in their home region. The southern delegation's response to fascist racism created a speed bump to both the investigation of fascist groups operating in the United States, and the country's response to the spread and intensity of racial ordering in Europe.

### **5.3. New Deal Politics: Huey Long and The Court Reorganization**

Huey Long, the unconventional Senator from Louisiana, shifted the discourse of fascism in U.S. politics as part of his campaign against President Roosevelt. Standing before the Seventy-Fourth Congress in 1936, Long loudly and repeatedly accused FDR and the New Deal of being fascist. Up to that point, the fascist charge against the New Deal had primarily been levelled by Republicans who stridently contended it mirrored policies enacted by Hitler and Mussolini that unduly concentrated power with the chief executive.<sup>119</sup> By breaching party discipline, "The Kingfish" opened the door for other Democrats, especially southern Democrats, to utilize the fascist comparison as a tactic to argue against the more liberal aspects of the New Deal.<sup>120</sup> As a result, southerners played an outsized role in how Congress framed its understanding of the New Deal within the context of fascism.

Early in FDR's presidency, critics of the New Deal highlighted parallels between the "Hundred-Day Plan" and the Nazi Enabling Act of 1933 since both granted

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<sup>119</sup> Republicans accounted for approximately two-thirds of speeches that compared to the New Deal to fascism during the 1930s per analysis of the Congressional Record.

<sup>120</sup> Long's nickname was based upon a character in the popular comedy radio program *Amos 'n Andy* about poor African Americans that were voiced by white actors. Amused by the "Kingfish" character, Huey would snatch up the telephone receiver and bark, "This is the Kingfish speakin'."

substantial emergency powers to the chief executive.<sup>121</sup> This perception was far from reactionary. As Schivelbusch noted, “the consensus among political scientists and economists of the time was that the United States under Roosevelt in the spring and summer of 1933 had, in a process of voluntary consolidation, transformed itself into a post liberal state.” European fascists recognized kinship between their systems and Roosevelt’s methods. The Nazi newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter*, in an article titled “Roosevelt’s Dictatorial Recovery Measures,” informed readers of “Roosevelt’s adoption of National Socialist strains of thought in his economic and social policies.”<sup>122</sup> Mussolini wrote in July 1933, that elements of the New Deal were “reminiscent of the ways and means by which Fascism awakened the Italians people.” The Fascist journal of political theory, *Gerarchia*, opined that Roosevelt’s National Recovery Administration (NRA) bore a “Fascist signature.”<sup>123</sup> Defenders of Roosevelt’s agenda did not generally counterargue the specific fascist charge, perhaps because there were instances of real similarities, but rather emphasized how the need for urgent and swift measures necessitated an unusual delegation of powers from the legislature to the executive. General Hugh Johnston, former head of the NRA, stated “No one will ever know how close we were to collapse and revolution. We could have had a dictator a lot easier than Germany got Hitler, and we would have had one but for the President himself...”<sup>124</sup>

One of Long’s first salvos against Roosevelt was a January speech in which he complained that the New Deal had “placed in the boards and bureaucracies of this Government today dictatorial powers to do really more than the Hitlers and Mussolinis...”<sup>125</sup> He repeated the accusation in three subsequent speeches on the Senate

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<sup>121</sup> It is worth noting that when detractors of the New Deal alleged fascism, they were narrowly referring to fascism’s characteristics of dictatorship and authoritarianism, not the broader list of practices contained within the fascist charge of the South (e.g., racism, anti-unionism, disenfranchisement).

<sup>122</sup> Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Three New Deals: Reflections on Roosevelt’s America, Mussolini’s Italy, and Hitler’s Germany, 1933-1939* (New York: Picador, 2006), 14, 18-19.

<sup>123</sup> The idea of the New Deal as a variant of fascism had long legs. Ronald Regan in an interview with *Time Magazine* stated, “Fascism was really the basis for the New Deal. It was Mussolini’s success in Italy, with his government-directed economy, that led the early New Dealers to say ‘But Mussolini keeps the trains running on time,’” see *Time Magazine*, May 17, 1976; Schivelbusch, *Three New Deals*, 23-24.

<sup>124</sup> *New York Times*, March 5, 1935, 1.

<sup>125</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1935, Volume 79 Part 1:578.

floor with increasing vehemence.<sup>126</sup> Long accused the NRA of flooding Louisiana with “prostitutes” and “carpetbaggers” creating a situation worse than during Reconstruction, and praised the Supreme Court for saving the country from fascism when it ruled that the NRA was unconstitutional.<sup>127</sup>

The Kingfish had not always been hostile to Franklin Roosevelt. He supported FDR during the 1932 Democratic primary and actively campaigned for him during the general election. However, by late 1933 their relationship became strained as a result of clashing egos and conflicting visions on how best to guide the nation out of the Depression. Long noted, “The trouble is, Roosevelt hasn't taken all of my ideas; just part of them. I'm about one hundred yards ahead of him.”<sup>128</sup> While the tension between the two men percolated, Long worked to firm up his power base by consolidating his political hold over Louisiana and repairing the reputational damage he suffered as a result of a highly publicized incident during which he allegedly got into a fight after drunkenly urinating on another man's trousers.<sup>129</sup> Long's attacks on FDR increased in early 1934 before peaking in 1935 as the 1936 Democratic presidential primary loomed on the horizon.<sup>130</sup> While Long's attempt to brand FDR a fascist made him a pariah to many in his own party, it did shift the Overton Window and subsequently more Democrats began to identify the New Deal with fascism.

Some considered Long's rhetoric hypocritical, or at least ironic, given that he was the politician who was considered by many the most likely to usher in a fascist national government.<sup>131</sup> Long himself realized his potential. His political machine employed violence against his enemies and subverted local democratic institutions to capture almost

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<sup>126</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1935, Volume 79 Part 5: 5112; *Congressional Record*, 1935, Volume 79 Part 8: 9154; *Congressional Record*, 1935, Volume 79 Part 8: 9100.

<sup>127</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1935, Volume 79 Part 8:9100.

<sup>128</sup> T. Harry Williams, *Huey Long* (New York: Vintage, 1981), 637.

<sup>129</sup> Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin & The Great Depression* (New York: Vintage Books, 1982), 65-70.

<sup>130</sup> As part of his campaign against FDR, in early 1935 Long introduced a resolution in Congress to investigate Postmaster General James Farley, one of the president's closest advisors and the head of the Democratic National Committee, for corruption, see Brinkley, *Voices*, 75.

<sup>131</sup> Long's untimely death by assassination in September 1935 by the son of a political rival ended this possibility.

total control over Louisiana's government.<sup>132</sup> Huey bragged on the floor of the U.S. Senate that he could become America's "Fascist King" if he so desired.<sup>133</sup> General Johnson, former head of the National Recovery Administration, declared that Long was "a dictator by force of arms and that Adolf Hitler has nothing on him" and "the Hitler of one of our sovereign states."<sup>134</sup> Even his fellow southerners recognized the resemblance. One wrote shortly after Long's assassination, "sic semper tyrannis."<sup>135</sup> Indeed, when Sinclair Lewis created a fascist dictator in his 1935 novel *It Can't Happen Here*, he modelled him after Huey Long. Long defended himself against direct comparisons to Hitler on the grounds that he did not believe in religious persecution. Furthermore, Huey refused to be recruited by Philip Johnson, an affluent American Nazi sympathizer, into leading the nascent grey-shirted American Nationalist Party that was modelled on the Nazis.<sup>136</sup>

After Long breached the rhetorical Rubicon, many of his fellow southerners began to energetically to attack the New Deal as a fascist construct. By its nature, the New Deal was apt to foment a degree of schizophrenia among conservative southerners. On one hand, federal funding was welcomed relief in response to the collapse of agricultural prices and the general poverty of the region. On the other, the expansion of federal power conflicted with deeply held southern conservative principles of states' rights and individual responsibility. Southern politicians bridged this divide during the first four years of the New Deal by welcoming federal money as long as it did not threaten local racial and labour social structures. Southerners insisted upon local control on how program benefits were allocated. The Senate Majority leader, Joe Robinson of Arkansas, explained this paradigm, "so long as they [New Dealers] were pro-farmer and

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<sup>132</sup> Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*, 25-25, 69.

<sup>133</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1935, Volume 79 Part 8:9154.

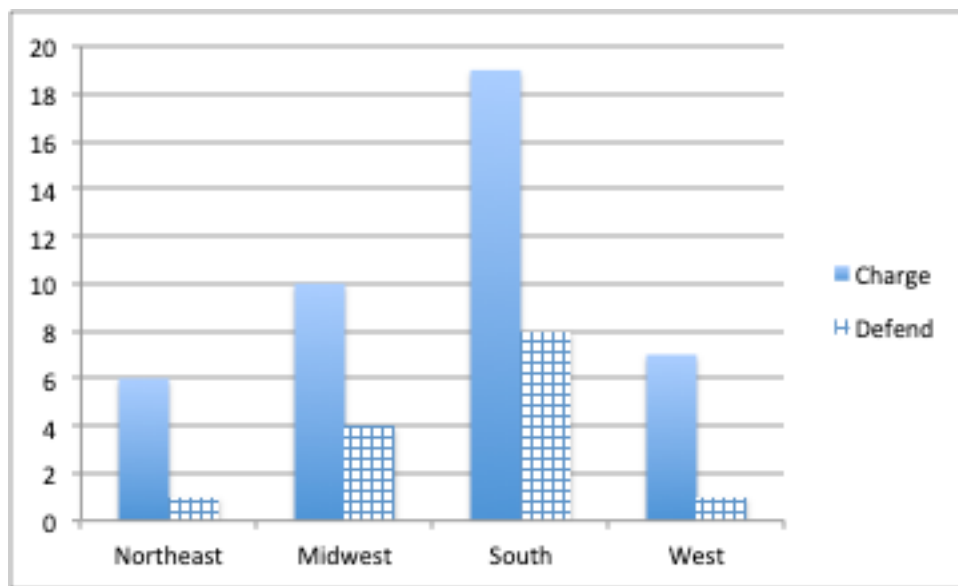
<sup>134</sup> *New York Times*, March 5, 1935, 10.

<sup>135</sup> Letter from Congressman Colmer (Mississippi) to Congressman Wright Patman (Texas), September 10, 1935, Box 15, Folder 2, Dies Papers.

<sup>136</sup> Long stated, "Don't compare me with that son of a bitch. Anybody that lets his public policies be mixed up with religious prejudices is a plain goddamn fool," see Richard White, *Kingfish: The Reign of Huey P. Long* (New York: Random House, 2006), 240 – 248;

did not stir up the niggers — he was with them.”<sup>137</sup> In early years of the New Deal, Southern politicians were quite comfortable promoting a liberal social democracy for their white constituents while concurrently insisting upon a restrictive racial order for African Americans. This *détente* began to fracture during FDR’s second term when New Deal programs began to threaten the region’s social and economic traditions. The cognitive dissonance experienced by southern politicians by these two conflicting aspects of the New Deal — relief and disruption — is reflected by intensity of discussion among them as to whether New Deal programs were reminiscent of fascism.

**Figure 12: Speeches Given Attacking or Defending the New Deal as Fascist by Region (1930-1939)**



While the southern reactionary attack on the New Deal as fascist is not surprising given how the programs increased federal power and bureaucratic governance, the number of southerners who used the language of fascism to defend the administration is more unexpected. Perhaps they were the most intellectually prepared to parry the accusation as a result of being so frequently smeared themselves by the fascist charge. The southern defence led to some unexpected debates. When Congressman Josh Lee from Oklahoma argued that FDR’s robust exercise of executive power had saved the republic in the face of the social unrest resulting from the Great Depression, a northern

<sup>137</sup> Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself*, 160-163.

congressman accused him of betraying his southern heritage, since he claimed that FDR's administration was eradicating "the rights of the States, for which that great Southern Confederacy fought for so long, shed so much blood, expended so great a treasure..."<sup>138</sup> Interestingly enough, with this sentiment the northern congressman echoed the Nashville Agrarians, by identifying South's traditions as inherently anti-fascist. Texas congressman Thomas Blanton argued that the country need not fear the spawning of structural authoritarianism from the New Deal as long as the Supreme Court remained as an independent check on executive power.<sup>139</sup> This line of reasoning is noteworthy because it was precisely FDR's attempt to 'pack' the Supreme Court in 1937 that created a serious break between the administration and southern Democrats. Whether for or against, the intensity of the discourse around the New Deal-to-fascist comparison strongly suggests that European fascism played a key role in how congressmen framed their understanding and objections to the New Deal. The southern delegation was in the middle of this debate that inhibited the scope and reach of FDR's proposed reforms.

Roosevelt's proposal to expand or "pack" the Supreme Court in 1937 super charged fears among many about FDR's desire to achieve Mussolini and Hitler like authority. Over the previous four years the Supreme Court had declared six pieces of New Deal legislation unconstitutional including the Agricultural Adjustment Act and the National Industrial Relations Act.<sup>140</sup> When a frustrated Roosevelt proposed to reform the court to make it more amenable to New Deal measures his opponents claimed he was striving for dictatorial powers by "packing the court" with his supporters. Former southern allies such as Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee Hatton Sumners from Texas, and Vice President Garner from Texas considered this to be an overly ambitious power grab.<sup>141</sup> After being briefed on the plan along with other senior leaders, Sumners famously stated, "Boys, here's where I cash in my chips." In the Senate cloakroom, Vice President Garner displayed his opinion of the proposed bill by holding

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<sup>138</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1935, Volume 79 Part 8:9240.

<sup>139</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1935, Volume 79 Part 1:858.

<sup>140</sup> Jean Edward Smith, *FDR* (New York: Random House, 2007), 377.

<sup>141</sup> An in-depth case study of Representative Hatton Sumners' perspective on fascism is presented in Chapter 7.

his nose and giving it a thumbs down.<sup>142</sup> When FDR refused to back down in the face of this opposition, Garner refused to offer any assistance and returned to his ranch in Texas.<sup>143</sup>

Like the New Deal itself, the merits of the Court Reorganization were contested with the discourse of fascism. Congressman Ham Fish from New York argued if the reorganization plan was approved the legislature, “could set up fascism in this country overnight if the people’s rights and liberties were not protected by the Supreme Court.”<sup>144</sup> Congressman John Robsion from Kentucky declared that success of the bill would mean that “our President then will have taken the identical steps that were taken by Mussolini, Hitler, and other dictators of the world...”<sup>145</sup> Congressman Mark Wilcox from Florida worried that the plan would set a precedent that could be used by a future fascist president to undermine American democracy.<sup>146</sup> Senator Josiah Bailey from North Carolina represented the reorganization bill as a march towards fascism by putting the state above the individual.<sup>147</sup> Even previously sympathetic journalists used the fascist comparison to excoriate the plan. William Allen White of *The Emporia Gazette* wrote, “Surely Mr. Roosevelt’s mandate was to function as the President, not as Der Fuehrer.” Prominent journalist Mark Sullivan of the *New York Herald* prophesized, “We are going down the road to fascism.”<sup>148</sup> Defenders of the court reorganization plan in-turn asserted the Supreme Court was an undemocratic quasi-fascist institution.<sup>149</sup> After weeks of debate, on July 22, 1937 Sumners and Garner were joined by a number of other prominent southern congressmen in defeating the proposed court reorganization.<sup>150</sup> The

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<sup>142</sup> Lynne Olson, *Those Angry Days: Roosevelt, Lindbergh, and America’s Fight over World War II, 1939-1941* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2014), 59.

<sup>143</sup> Smith, *FDR*, 388.

<sup>144</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1937, Volume 81 Part 1:321.

<sup>145</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1937, Volume 81 Part 4:4697.

<sup>146</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1937, Volume 81 Part 2:1615.

<sup>147</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1937, Volume 81 Part 6:7097.

<sup>148</sup> Smith, *FDR*, 385.

<sup>149</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1937, Volume 81 Part 2:1987.

<sup>150</sup> Kari Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South, 1932-1968* (Chapel Hill: University Of North Carolina Press, 2001), 23.



court packing bill was defeated 70 to 20, garnering only three votes from the South's twenty-six senators.<sup>151</sup> The discourse of fascism was fundamental in sinking Roosevelt's plan to reform the judiciary.

The failure of the court reorganization bill was a key determinant in FDR's decision to punish 'disloyal' elements within the Democratic Party during the 1938 midterm elections. FDR labelled these individuals "Copperheads" — a reference to Democrats that encouraged a negotiated peace with the South during the Civil War.<sup>152</sup> While not all Copperheads were southern, there were enough of them to give the anti-New Deal coalition a Dixie twang. Senator Josiah Bailey of North Carolina led a bipartisan effort to draft a ten-point "Conservative Manifesto" that rebuked New Deal liberalism.<sup>153</sup> Senators Walter George of Georgia, "Cotton" Ed Smith of South Carolina, Millard Tydings of Maryland, and Carter Glass of Virginia had voted against New Deal legislation one-third, one half, and three-quarters, and four-fifths of the time respectively.<sup>154</sup>

As part of his campaign against these southern dissenters, FDR established a special federal economic commission to report on the economic condition of the South; a report intended to produce 'talking-points' to be used against his southern adversaries. Next, Roosevelt took the unprecedented step of intervening in three senate primary elections to 'purge' disloyal Democratic senators and to serve as a warning to others. His targets were three incumbent southern senators: Walter George, "Cotton" Ed Smith, and Millard Tydings — all of who opposed Supreme Court restructuring.<sup>155</sup> Carter Glass was for now outside of FDR's reach as he was not up for re-election in 1938. FDR publicly initiated his purge with an in-person attack on Walter George while in Barnesville, Georgia. During this August 11 speech, FDR referred to the results of the economic study

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<sup>151</sup> Govtrack, To Recommit to the Committee on the Judicial Branch of the Government S. 1392, A Bill to Reorganize the Judiciary Branch, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/75-1/s42>.

<sup>152</sup> "Report to the Nation on National Affairs," June 24, 1938, Box 39, FDR Presidential Library & Museum.

<sup>153</sup> Smith, *FDR* 391.

<sup>154</sup> Smith, *FDR* 413.

<sup>155</sup> Dunn, *Roosevelt's Purge*, 149.

he had commissioned to decry the state of the South. FDR intoned, “It is my conviction that the South presents right now the Nation’s Number 1 economic problem.”<sup>156</sup> He continued, “Things will not come to us in the South if we oppose progress—if we believe in our hearts that the feudal system is still the best system. When you come down to it, there is little difference between the feudal system and the Fascist system. If you believe in the one, you lean to the other.”<sup>157</sup> Roosevelt utilized the discourse of fascism as a tactic to eliminate his political opponents by identifying those politicians who opposed his policies as pro-fascist.

With his attack on Walter George, FDR made the case to Georgians that he needed true New Dealers to help solve the South’s problems, and that their incumbent senator was not one of them. FDR’s gambit backfired. Most Georgians were resentful of FDR’s attempt to dictate local politics, and many southerners seethed at the negative picture painted by the economic report of their region. A poll taken shortly after this speech showed seventy-five percent of Georgians disapproved of his interference with Georgia politics.<sup>158</sup> Margaret Mitchell, author of *Gone with the Wind*, in a letter to a Northern friend wrote that Georgians who previously supported FDR were saying, “I’m damned if any Yankee is going to tell me how to mark my ballot!”<sup>159</sup> Walter George likened FDR’s criticism to General Sherman’s invasion during the Civil War, stating it constituted a “second march through Georgia.”<sup>160</sup> Senator Reynolds dismissed FDR’s critique on southern poverty by pointing out that at least poor southerners had the virtue of being “God-fearing and patriotic.”<sup>161</sup>

This same scenario played-out in South Carolina and Maryland with senators “Cotton” Ed Smith and Millard Tydings respectively. Roosevelt attempted and failed to oust incumbents who he viewed as obstructive to New Deal policies. FDR started his

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<sup>156</sup> Dunn, *Roosevelt’s Purge*, 154.

<sup>157</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, Address at Gainesville, Georgia, March 23, 1938. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/209547>

<sup>158</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, “Attack on Sen. George Disapproved in Georgia Poll,” August 17, 1938.

<sup>159</sup> Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South*, viii.

<sup>160</sup> “Senator George Hits at Roosevelt Speech,” *Greenwood Commonwealth*, Aug. 15, 1938, 8.

<sup>161</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1939, Volume 84 Part 1:755.

attempted purge by asserting that the conservatism of the South was akin to fascism; by the end, southern conservatives reversed the accusation and claimed that his intervention in the Democratic primaries smacked of dictatorship and was an emulation of tactics used by Mussolini and Hitler.<sup>162</sup> FDR retreated from his strategy of targeting conservative southern Democrats after this disastrous experiment, but the bitterness lingered. Senator Reynolds from North Carolina snubbed FDR in favour of Vice President Garner when he presented Garner with a gift from the Coast Guard, stating “[no one] within the confines of the United States more highly respected.”<sup>163</sup> Given the well-known grudge between FDR and Garner, it was an insult by way of compliment to another; FDR as an ex-navy man would have treasured the gift and praise for himself. All the same, the rift between FDR and the South eventually healed as the international situation darkened, and the very conservatives FDR tried to purge became his strongest allies in overriding isolationist Democrats from other regions.

In the observation of fascism, America was changed by it. The discourse of fascism effectively limited the scope and reach of the New Deal. As a concept, it was weaponized by both conservatives and progressives in the Democratic Party. The comparison of FDR’s proposed judicial reform to European fascism provided a pivotal talking point in its defeat. The flood of New Deal-to-fascist comparisons from Democrats triggered by Huey Long sensitized FDR to the charge of dictatorship and likely caused him to tread more carefully in his use of executive power. It is clear that the fascist accusation preoccupied his mind. On a breezy Georgia night in March 1938, he summoned reporters to a post-midnight news conference at the Little White House in Warm Springs, Georgia to issue a statement denying he had any dictatorial ambitions.<sup>164</sup>

Americans’ understanding and the discourse of fascism shaped the debate regarding the size and scope of economic and social policy in the 1930s. Even ignoring

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<sup>162</sup> Dunn, *Roosevelt’s Purge*, 167, 198.

<sup>163</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1939, Volume 84 Part 1:230.

<sup>164</sup> The communiqué was in the form of a letter to an unidentified friend who expressed concern about the authoritarian bent of the Roosevelt’s agenda, see *New York Times*, “Dutch Is Up: FDR vs. Congress,” April 3, 1938, 63; Franklin D. Roosevelt, Letter on the Reorganization Bill, March 29, 1938. Accessed via the American Presidency Project.

Huey Long's contribution, the southern delegation was in the centre of this discussion. Southern politicians were the most vocal in describing the New Deal as a fascist homunculus, and also the most important defenders against this charge. The South's connection with fascism — ranging from its identification, parallel social structures, and transnational exchanges — contextually primed the southern political response. Southerners proved adept at using the discourse of fascism to protect their regional racial and economic traditions while concurrently impeding progressive reforms on the national level.

#### **5.4. Foreign Affairs: The Spanish Civil War and Anschluss**

As the decade progressed the topic of European fascism increasingly dominated the discussions of international relations in Congress during the 1930s. In the earlier part of the decade, it was common for congressmen to lump Mussolini and Hitler together with Stalin often to make a broader point about dictators. Events such as Spanish Civil War and the *Anschluss* had the effect of focusing these conversations on the specific characteristics of fascism as distinct from the broader phenomena of totalitarianism. While recognizing the reality of fascist militarism, the southern congressional delegation was the least vocal in condemning the it throughout decade.

Congressional debate around the Spanish Civil War occurred primarily within the deliberation of the Neutrality Act of 1937 that prohibited the sale of arms and materials to countries engaged in civil wars. The provisions of the bill were lambasted by a handful of interventionist-minded congressmen as unfairly restricting aid to the 'democratically' elected Spanish government.<sup>165</sup> Inherent within their objections was a strong moral condemnation of fascism as a system of government. They highlighted the alleged atrocities committed by the Franco's Nationalists and their allies against civilians

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<sup>165</sup> The debate over the fairness of the 1936 election was one of the primary triggers for the Spanish Civil War. After evidence of widespread fraud, the military revolted against the Republican government. The sweeping manipulation of the election results meant that democracy ceased to exist in Spain by 1936, see Stanley Payne, *Franco: A Personal and Political Biography* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), 105-113.

including the bombing of Guernica. The southern delegation was not overly interested in this discussion; not one southerner argued to assist the left-of-centre Loyalists.

The *Anschluss*, the annexation of Austria into Nazi Germany on March 12, 1938, catalysed an intense congressional debate regarding Nazi militarism. Representative Martin Sweeney from Ohio described the *Anschluss* as the “rape of Austria.”<sup>166</sup> Southern congressmen either ignored, cheered, or downplayed the importance of the event. Congressman Robsion of Kentucky noted, “Germany has merely taken over a small devastated territory of 32,000 square miles, about three-fourths the size of Kentucky.” He argued the *Anschluss* reflected the democratic aspirations of the Austrian people stating, “[ever since the Versailles Treaty] these Austrian Germans have desired to be part of Germany...a million met in the highway and along the streets of Vienna to welcome Hitler. The people cried and kissed each other for joy.”<sup>167</sup> Senator Bilbo from Mississippi complimented Hitler on the *Anschluss* for providing the world an example on the conservation of racial values.<sup>168</sup> The southern delegation’s silence on the Spanish Civil War and support of the *Anschluss* was consistent with its overall favourable discourse related to the fascist states.

In reaction to the militarism of the fascist regimes, the Roosevelt administration proposed in 1938 to substantially expand U.S. naval forces via the Naval Expansion Act that called for increasing the existing naval building program by twenty percent and for appropriations to build two additional battleships and two additional cruisers.<sup>169</sup> The debate between isolationists and internationalists on the naval bill was reframed at times into a discussion about fascism. Advocates of increased naval spending emphasized the dangerous and evil nature of European fascism. Congressman Byron Scott of California, a vocal supporter of naval expansion, articulated the threat to America by asserting, “[the fascist dictators] are not in search of world peace, they are in search of the exact opposite. They built their navies and are building their navies for the express purpose of

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<sup>166</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1938, Volume 83 Part 5:4795.

<sup>167</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1938, Volume 83 Part 3:3502.

<sup>168</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1938, Volume 83 Part 7:7361.

<sup>169</sup> Message of President Roosevelt to the Congress, January 28, 1938, accessed via the American Presidency Project.

conquest.”<sup>170</sup> Representative Adolph Sabath of Illinois echoed Scott’s concerns, saying, “There is not the slightest doubt in my mind but that Hitler, Mussolini, and the raving-mad Japanese war lords are in a conspiracy to divide the entire world among themselves.”<sup>171</sup>

The primary opposition to the bill came from the isolationist-minded Midwest. Economic incentives also played a role. Congressman William Lambertson from Kansas astutely noted that support for the naval bill was high correlated with the proximity of shipyards to a congressman’s district.<sup>172</sup> While Midwesterners were in the vanguard of the opposition, when the bill was framed specifically as a defence against fascism some of the loudest voices of opposition came from the South. Congressman Maury Maverick from Texas inveighed against the proposed legislation by arguing that Hitler posed no threat to the United States, and that a military build-up would only provoke war. He compared the horror stories being told about Hitler to the exaggerated British propaganda spread about the Kaiser during the First World War.<sup>173</sup> Representative Ed Creal from Kentucky warned his colleagues of “wild, unsound talk to sway the country and make people think that Hitler is in the Bermudas already, and other things are happening so that we must immediately prepare.”<sup>174</sup> Despite Maverick and Creal’s opposition, the bill passed with overwhelming southern support.<sup>175</sup> Of the thirty-one Democrats who broke ranks with the president, the vast majority were from the Midwest and only four were from the South, consistent with the region’s broader voting pattern on international issues during the interwar years.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, March 17, 1938, Volume 83 Part 4:3613.

<sup>171</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, March 18, 1938, Volume 83 Part 4:3663.

<sup>172</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1938, Volume 83 Part 4:3687; [https://ww2db.com/facility/shipyards\\_list](https://ww2db.com/facility/shipyards_list).

<sup>173</sup> “The Kaiser and Hitler. It is the same old stuff, except it is Hitler instead of the Kaiser,” see *Congressional Record*, 1938, Volume 83 Part 3:2393, 3331.

<sup>174</sup> Despite his reservations Creal declared he would vote in favor the bill U.S. Congress, see *Congressional Record*, 1938, Volume 83 Part 4:3671.

<sup>175</sup> Govtrack, H. R. 9218, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/75-3/h115>.

<sup>176</sup> In general, Democrats voted consistently against isolationist positions during the interwar years — casting votes only approximately ten percent of the time in favor — with these primarily originating from

## 5.5. Conclusion

An analysis of the congressional discourse during the 1930s reveals that European fascism provided fundamental context for both domestic and international public policy formulation in the United States. The southern delegation's political response to fascism unequivocally presents the South as the region that was the most sympathetic to the European fascist regimes and some of the key practices of fascism. Southern congressmen demonstrated a decade-long pattern of refusing to criticize the fascist states and a penchant to defend them, that cultivated a discursal framework that made space for distinct and pivotal voices, time-and-time again southern, to operate on the fringes.

Whether it be Senator Reynolds from North Carolina as the "Tar Heel Fuehrer" who lauded the fascist states as modern economic paradigms, Theodore Bilbo the self-styled "Mussolini of Mississippi," or liberal Maury Maverick from Texas who dismissed negative press around fascism as propaganda, southern congressmen were not overly concerned about the racism and other illiberal practices of European fascism.<sup>177</sup> To the extent they found the system unsavoury, it was for the same reasons the Confederate secessionists disclaimed the Union before the Civil War: the abridgement of states' rights and individual liberties. The southern delegation unambiguously generated the most favourable rhetoric regarding fascism, being over-represented in favourable/defensive comments and underrepresented in its criticism. This behaviour was steeped in the similarities between the social structures of the South and the fascist states.

While overall the most reticent region to engage in the discourse of fascism, the southern delegation was flexible in operationalizing it to promote traditional white southern socio-economic values. Across all the examples provided throughout this chapter there was one constant: southern congressmen utilized the discourse of fascism as a rhetorical Swiss-army knife to defend and protect the social and racial structures of the South that they viewed as under attack by outsiders. Senator Heflin utilized it in service of his Ku Klux Klan inspired worldview as a weapon to discredit Catholic politicians and

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the Midwest and only infrequently from the South, see Smuckler, Ralph H, "The Region of Isolationism," *The American Political Science Review* 47, no. 2 (1953): 401.

<sup>177</sup> Raymond Arsenault and George Wright, "The Folklore of Southern Demagoguery," 120.

those who supported racial integration.<sup>178</sup> Senator Bilbo from Mississippi justified the South's racial policies by pointing towards those of the fascist states. Other congressmen defended the supposed humanity of Jim Crow Laws by comparing them to the murderous treatment Black Africans received from Fascist Italy. Southern congressmen constructed principled arguments against the progressivism of the New Deal by comparing to the 'tyranny' of European fascism. In an attempt to shape U.S. foreign policy, congressmen such as Blanton, Reynolds, and Maverick engaged in the discourse of fascism to argue for a more agnostic America first policy that would accommodate friendly relations with the fascist states. Their motivation was perhaps influenced by a sense that the fascist states were fellow travellers in many regards to the South.

The examples given in this chapter of pro-fascist southern voices may seem interesting but not indicative when each is viewed in isolation. Considered independently they may seem like picayune occurrences; but when regarded together across the decade, these individual data points are like dots in a Seurat painting that give shape to the overall landscape. Such interjections did not originate with any discernible pattern from non-southern congressmen; this pointillism was unique to the South. The South's climate of opinion shaped the worldview of its politicians, as they were profoundly affected by a socio-economic environment that mirrored fascist Europe in many ways.<sup>179</sup> "The rituals of southern supremacy" that so closely matched fascist practice "slipped from the conscious mind down deep into the muscles and glands" into the discourse of southern congressmen.<sup>180</sup> The southern delegation's favourable political discourse on fascism shaped American responses to European political development, giving space to the rise of fascism in Europe during the 1930s, and thus bears some responsibility for the consequences of this system.

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<sup>178</sup> Wyn Wade, *The Fiery Cross*, 268.

<sup>179</sup> T.W. Adorno, *The Authoritarian Personality* (Harper & Brothers, 1950), 6.

<sup>180</sup> Lillian Smith, *Killers of the Dream*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1949), 81.



## 6. Case Studies of Three Southern Politicians

The previous chapter demonstrated the distinctive southern political response to fascism. The Southern political discourse offered a relatively friendly and encouraging voice regarding European fascism, and southerners were in turn, recognized as kindred spirits by European fascists. This chapter expands on these findings by illuminating how three individual politicians operationalized the discourse of fascism for opportunistic, reactionary, and transformational purposes. Beyond providing insight into some of the specific individual motivations that collectively made up the southern pattern of behaviour, the case studies shed light on how these lawmakers — who maintained that their region was the most ‘American’ in the country — squared the circle when faced with similarities between ‘un-American’ European fascist practices and those in the South.

The politicians investigated in the case studies are Martin Dies Jr., Hatton W. Sumners, and Sam Rayburn — three congressmen from central or eastern Texas. While Texas bridges the South and the West, during this time, East and Central Texas belonged to a much greater degree to the South. One reason to focus on the Texas delegation is because it was powerful, reaching new levels of influence when the 72<sup>nd</sup> Congress convened on December 7, 1931. Texas Democrats along with other southerners ascended to key positions of power in advance of FDR’s election. As a one-party region, southern Democrats tended to accrue greater seniority in office than their non-southern counterparts which put them first in line for leadership positions when the Democrats retook Congress as President Hoover and the Republican Party floundered in the wake of the Great Depression. During this Congress, ‘Cactus’ Jack Garner, the future Vice President under FDR, was elected as Speaker of the House and was supported by a cadre of fellow Texans who gained control over five of the House’s most influential committees.<sup>1</sup> It was the beginning of a run of congressional influence that Texans would hold, with only brief interruptions, for the next thirty years.

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<sup>1</sup> In 1931 Texans gained the following Chairman positions: Hatton Sumners, House Judiciary Committee; Sam Rayburn, House Committee on Interstate Commerce; Joe Mansfield, Rivers and Harbors Committee; Marvin Jones, House Agriculture Committee; Fritz Lanham Public Buildings Committee, see Robert Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: Vol. 1, The Path to Power* (New York: Knopf, 1982), 218-219;

Sectional and state specific loyalty acted as force multiplier that increased the influence of the Texas delegation. Working together as a tightly knit group, its members met weekly for private lunches to discuss policy and circled the wagons in the face of attacks by outsiders. When Vice President Jack Gardner was disparaged by a CIO labour organizer for being a hard drinking “evil old man,” the Democratic Texas delegation unanimously defied FDR by repudiating this characterization with a Congressional resolution. This event foreshadowed a future insurgency by Texas congressmen against FDR even as he remained personally popular among Texas voters. During the 1940 Democratic primary the Texas delegation represented the biggest hurdle to FDR’s re-election when it rebelled against him during the party’s primary in favour of Vice President Garner.<sup>2</sup>

The Texas congressmen presented in the case studies were selected based upon their influential positions within the House of Representatives and their activities related to fascism. Each also left behind papers and records sufficient to tease out their thinking on the topic in contrast to politicians such as Jack Garner who had his public and private papers burned. Martin Dies Jr. was a member of the powerful Rules Committee and was the Chairman of the Special Committee on Un-American Activities that was tasked with ascertaining the activities and threats posed by fascist and communists in the United States. Hatton Sumners was the Chairman of the Judiciary Committee and one of the most ardent defenders of southern social structures that were reminiscent of fascism. Sam Rayburn, while serving as Speaker of the House of Representatives, articulated the challenge of maintaining southern social structures in the context of America’s response to fascism. Along with the Congressional Record, the archived professional papers of these congressmen served as key primary sources. Martin Dies’ papers are held at Sam Houston University’s Regional Library and Research Center in Liberty, Texas. Hatton

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Southerners chaired twenty-nine of the forty-seven committees in the House after the election of 1932, see Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself*, 149.

<sup>2</sup> Caro, *Path to Power*, 532, 573, 592.

Sumners' papers are maintained by the Dallas Historical Society at Fair Park in Dallas, Texas. Sam Rayburn's papers are archived at the University of Texas at Austin.<sup>3</sup>

Collectively, Dies, Sumners, and Rayburn represented a diverse range of responses. Dies led the highest profile interwar investigation of fascism in the United States that he bent to his own opportunistic purposes while consistently maintaining that this was not the case. Although not an entirely novel behaviour in politics — saying one thing while doing another — in Dies' case, it resulted in a significantly diminished public perception regarding the relative threat of fascism and provided encouragement for European fascists. Sumners spotlighted fascism in arguments for the preservation of traditional southern social structures; structures that ironically were perceived by many Americans as being akin to those in fascist Europe. Rayburn, like many of his southern colleagues, was generally quiescent about fascism, at least in the public record. The record he left is illustrative of someone who over time experienced increasing cognitive dissonance, pressured by his defence of southern socio-economic practices and a revilement of fascism.

The previous chapters presented an interwar South that was distinct from the other regions in the United States by its degree of connection to European fascism. The case studies presented in this chapter demonstrate that, if anything, the purely quantitative analysis understates the southern delegation's relative accommodation of European fascism. Even when southern politicians, like Dies, Sumners, and Rayburn, spoke out against fascism, their actions often were often directed otherwise with a view towards defending southern social structures. The case studies highlight how southern politicians utilized the discourse of fascism for their own personal political purposes and the defence of their region, even while their rhetoric was strained at times by the challenge of condemning European fascism as un-American while simultaneously defending fascist-like practices in their home region. Their dilemma foreshadowed a struggle experienced by many Americans in the post-war Civil Rights period.

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<sup>3</sup> While these three congressmen were important contributors to the southern discourse on fascism, the case studies only scratch the surface as a sample set. Future research that casts a wider net across the personal and professional papers of southern politicians may reveal other findings regarding the nature of fascist related discourse amongst the South's congressional delegation.

## 6.1. Martin Dies Jr.: The South Investigates

First elected to Congress in 1929, Martin Dies Jr. was a tall blond blue-eyed Texan of German-English descent who embodied some of the most conservative elements of Texas politics during the interwar period.<sup>4</sup> Martin followed in his father's footsteps by representing the people of East Texas in the House of Representatives. While he served in Congress for seven terms from 1931 to 1945, this case study primarily focuses upon his activities as chairman of Dies Committee — also known as the Special Committee on Un-American Activities (SCUA) — for the interwar years 1938-1939.<sup>5</sup> Dies' investigation propelled him from a relatively unknown Texas congressman to a national figure in just a few years to such an extent that his name was briefly floated in the press as FDR's possible running mate in 1940.<sup>6</sup>

Representing a district that was over ninety percent Anglo-American, Dies was a proud believer in white supremacy and segregation, and embraced racial politics from the very beginning of his political career.<sup>7</sup> During his first run for office in 1930, he praised his Confederate ancestors and derided “ignorant niggers” in contrast to “intellectual whites.”<sup>8</sup> He railed against the only Black member in Congress at that time, Oscar DePriest from Chicago. He complained that DePriest “insulted the honour of the South marching two buck negroes down the aisles of Congress the other day and introduced them as ‘gentlemen’ of his race.” He also objected to DePriest's wife attending a tea party for ladies hosted by President Hoover's wife. Dies exclaimed, “I would have voiced...the opposition of the Second District to social equality between whites and blacks...I would not have sat idly by and permitted the memory of my Confederate

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<sup>4</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1938, Volume 83 Part 7:7568; “Dies Enlists for ‘Duration of War’ to Keep Out Foreign Influences,” *Beaumont Journal*, Oct 26, 1938, 1.

<sup>5</sup> The special committee later when it became a standing committee became known as the House Un-American Committee (HUAC).

<sup>6</sup> “FDR to Run Then Resign, Demos Told,” *Austin American Statesmen*, June 5, 1940, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Walter Goodman, *The Committee: The Extraordinary Career of the House Committee on Un-American Activity* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1968), 20.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Dies Speech, March 29, 1930, Box 158, Folder 62, Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center in Liberty, Texas, Texas State Library and Archives Commission (hereafter referred to as Dies Papers).

grandfather to be insulted.”<sup>9</sup> Dies’ political enemies claimed that he had threatened to physically “knock Oscar DePriest down” when he got into Congress as retribution for what he considered DePriest’s ‘subversive’ actions in favour of racial equality.<sup>10</sup> Dies denied ever saying this, labelling the claim a “silly and juvenile tactic.”<sup>11</sup>

Even so, when arranging for his office in the Capitol Building, Dies was adamant that he be located as far as possible away from DePriest.<sup>12</sup> Further, when looking for a residence in the Washington D.C. area, Dies complained about the difficulty of finding decent housing at a “reasonable price in a neighbourhood not *infested* by negroes.”<sup>13</sup> His language of African Americans as an infestation brings to mind the Nazis’ description of Jews as parasites and bacteria. Dies, however, ardently rejected any suggestion that he was a racist. As evidence, he noted that he was the only attorney in Orange, Texas in the 1920s who stepped forward to defend two Catholics on trial — an action that infuriated the local chapter of the Klan.<sup>14</sup> Despite his protestations, Dies demonstrated early on that he was an arch-segregationist and promoter of white supremacy — positions that were squarely in line with the views of a majority of the voters in his district.

### 6.1.1. Ideology

Having taken office at the start of the Depression, Dies’ ‘big idea’ on solving the unemployment problem involved the suspension of all immigration for five years and the mass deportation of up to seven million existing immigrants.<sup>15</sup> He justified his dislike of

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<sup>9</sup> Martin Dies Speech, March 29 1930, Box 158, Folder 62, Dies Papers.

<sup>10</sup> Dennis McDaniel, *Martin Dies of Un-American Activities: His Life and Times*, dissertation, (University of Houston, 1988), 125; “Smith Speaks in South End,” *The Beaumont Journal*, July 17, 1936, 15.

<sup>11</sup> *Beaumont Enterprise*, July 22, 1936, 12.

<sup>12</sup> Dies (Orange, Texas) to Seale (Washington, D.C.), March 11, 1931, Box 90, File 29, Dies Papers.

<sup>13</sup> Dies to J.H. David (Orange, Texas), September 18, 1931, Box 90, Folder 23, Dies Papers.

<sup>14</sup> Despite the unsubstantiated claim made by Bill Minutaglio in his book *A Single Star and Bloody Knuckles: A History of Politics and Race in Texas* (page 166), there is no evidence that Dies was supported by the Klan during his 1930 run for Congress; Dies to Reverend J.M. Kirwin (Port Arthur, Texas), February 20, 1936, Box 2, Folder 32, Dies Papers.

<sup>15</sup> Telegram from Dies to Alfred E. Jones (Beaumont, Texas), September 3, 1931, Box 90, Folder 23, Dies Papers.

immigrants based on the logic that they took work from ‘real’ Americans and when unemployed added to the burden on the government.<sup>16</sup> He argued these points in the *Chicago Herald-Examiner* in 1930 and later in the *Washington Herald*. In each article Dies contended that the "large alien population is the basic cause of unemployment."<sup>17</sup> He was also repelled by the ‘subversive’ ideologies, such as Bolshevism, that he argued were being spread by new arrivals from Eastern Europe. He was accurate on this point, as approximately two-thirds of American Communists Party members in the 1930s were foreign born — comprised largely of immigrants from eastern European including ethnic Poles, ethnic Russians, and Jews.<sup>18</sup> While Dies argued against immigration from a jobs and anti-communism perspective, it is likely that his racial beliefs played a role in underpinning these positions. It is not hard to imagine that he was of the same mind as his congressman father who twenty years earlier testified before Congress that only northern Europeans qualified as “pure Caucasians.”<sup>19</sup>

Dies admired how European fascists handled immigration, praising Mussolini’s restrictive immigration policy for driving out “gangsters, murderers, and thieves.”<sup>20</sup> He sought to realize a similar vision by authoring a stream of legislation over the years intended to clampdown on immigration and ease the process of deporting ‘undesirables.’<sup>21</sup> Initially, this legislation primarily targeted Mexicans and communists

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<sup>16</sup> Dies to Reverend J.V. Berglund (Lufkin, Texas), June 29,1935, Box 2, Folder 31, Dies Papers.

<sup>17</sup> Martin Dies, “Six Million Aliens Thrive in Nation at Expense of United States Jobless Says Dies” *Washington Herald*, February 2, 1936; U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1936, Volume 80 Part 2:1367; Neil Betten, and Raymond A. Mohl, "From Discrimination to Repatriation: Mexican Life in Gary, Indiana, during the Great Depression," *Pacific Historical Review* 42, no. 3 (1973): 377.

<sup>18</sup> As seen elsewhere, the Jewish impact on the U.S. Communist Party was larger than their numbers alone would indicate as a result of their occupation of leadership positions. During the interwar period, Jews held on average forty percent of the leadership positions in the regional Central Committees in the U.S.; Harvey Kleher, *The Heyday of American Communism; the Depression Decade* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 162-163.

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Congress, *Relative to the Further Restriction of Immigration: Hearings Before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, House of Representatives, Sixty-second Congress, Second Session*, 1912, 50.

<sup>20</sup> *National Republic*, “Nationalism Spells Safety,” Volume XXI:11, March 1934, 1-3, Box 90, Dies Papers.

<sup>21</sup> *New York Times*, “Deportation Talk Revived,” February 16, 1936, 1.

who he rhetorically lumped together with pimps and criminals.<sup>22</sup> By 1936, fascists were added to the list of those to be expelled.<sup>23</sup> Despite his persistent efforts, Dies was unsuccessful pushing this legislation across the finish line because it was viewed by many as too extreme.

Ethnic nationalism, along with racism and nativism, completed the trifecta of Dies' worldview. Dies' conception of America was underpinned by a fantasy of racial, religious, and cultural homogeneity born out of the land, similar to the Nazi idea of 'blood and soil.' Dies described his own being — “the very fiber of my heart” — as shaped by the majestic trees and streams of East Texas.<sup>24</sup> In this regard, Dies and European fascists were squarely aligned with ideology of Johann Herder, sometimes considered the intellectual father of ethnic nationalism, who argued that those who speak the same language, inhabit the same land, hear the same folklore, and are a product of the same geographical environment possess a natural bond that serves as the foundation for a nation.<sup>25</sup> Both Herder and southern nationalists would have argued that the South, as distinct sub-nation within the United States, carried within itself the yardstick of its own perfection shaped by its economic situation and the primordialism of race and culture. Thus, southerners had the right to define their own notions of right and wrong that fit their particular situation. For southern elites who shared Dies' ideological inclinations, this meant a racial state and xenophobia towards foreigners.

In opposition to the ideology of ethnic nationalism was the principle of internationalism. Dies proclaimed in 1935 that he was “sick and tired of all this unintelligible jargon about internationalism,” and argued that what the country needed badly was more “selfish patriotism and less internationalism.”<sup>26</sup> Dies depicted foreigners

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<sup>22</sup> A sentiment that echoed down through the decades with President Trump's description of some immigrants as drug dealers and rapists, see *USA Today*, “Trump ramps up rhetoric on undocumented immigrants,” May 17, 2018; Dies to Reverend J.V. Berglund (Lufkin, Texas), June 29, 1935, Box 2, Folder 31, Dies Papers.

<sup>23</sup> Dies to Reverend J.M. Kirwin (Port Arthur, Texas), February 20, 1936, Box 2, Folder 32, Dies Papers.

<sup>24</sup> Martin Dies Speech, March 29, 1930, Box 158, Folder 62, Dies Papers.

<sup>25</sup> Sternhell, “Fascism,” 144.

<sup>26</sup> Dies to Reverend J.V. Berglund (Lufkin, Texas), June 29, 1935, Box 2, Folder 31, Dies Papers.

as “quarrelsome, militaristic, and grasping” people — individuals who would pollute a United States inhabited by native-born God-fearing Americans who revered the Constitution and the ideals of the Founding Fathers. Dies implored his fellow Americans to ignore the “tears of the sobbing sentimentalists and internationalists” and block the hordes of foreigners trying to immigrate to America with their bizarre ideas, especially those who would defile and agitate against the pillars of American exceptionalism: Christianity, capitalism, and America’s racial order.<sup>27</sup> He accused Europe of purposefully dumping their bedraggled unemployed on America, writing that America has “been the victim European duplicity, fraud, and internationalism,” leading his critics to accuse him of stirring up nationalist sentiment with his anti-immigration rhetoric.<sup>28</sup> Dies rejected this accusation asserting that his vision was aligned with the Christian principle that ‘charity starts at home,’ or in other words, ‘America first.’<sup>29</sup> As a practical solution, Dies suggested illegal aliens could be deported to rural South America — reminiscent of the Third Reich’s plan to solve its ‘Jewish Problem’ with forced deportations to Madagascar and Siberia.<sup>30</sup>

While opposed in Congress by progressives such as Fiorello LaGuardia and Robert La Follette Jr., Dies’ anti-immigrant positions were, in fact, to a great extent mainstream.<sup>31</sup> After the Supreme Court ruled that Congress had the sole authority to manage immigration in 1875, Congress quickly moved to pass the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 that banned the entry of Chinese workers, and the Immigration Act of 1882 which blocked the entry of “idiots, lunatics, and criminals.”<sup>32</sup> After more than fifteen million immigrants arrived in the country during the first two decades of the twentieth

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<sup>27</sup> *National Republic*, “Nationalism Spells Safety,” Volume XXI:11 (March 1934): 1.

<sup>28</sup> Dies to Reverend J.V. Berglund (Lufkin, Texas), June 29, 1935, Box 2, Folder 31, Dies Papers.

<sup>29</sup> “But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.” 1 Timothy 5:8, King James Version.

<sup>30</sup> Letter from Dies to J.S. Bordeaux (Longview, Texas), March 30, 1938, Box 15, Folder 6, Dies Papers.

<sup>31</sup> In May 1932 Dies’ bill, HR 12044, for the expulsion and exclusion of alien Communists passed the House despite the vociferous opposition of Representative Fiorello LaGuardia. It was however blocked in the Senate due to the actions of Robert La Follette Jr., see Michael Wreszin, *Congress Investigates*, 2925.

<sup>32</sup> U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Agency, “Early American Immigration Policies,” accessed July 9, 2021.



century, Congress greatly restricted new entries by passing the Immigration Acts of 1921 and 1924.<sup>33</sup> Worried about immigrants taking their jobs during the Great Depression, two-thirds of native-born Americans supported the idea that both legal immigrants and illegal aliens on relief should be sent back to their ‘own’ countries.<sup>34</sup> Almost no Americans thought the level of immigration should be increased, with those in favour ranging between five and eight percent.<sup>35</sup> A 1939 Gallup poll taken shortly after the *Kristallnacht* revealed two-thirds even opposed allowing refugee children from Germany into the country.<sup>36</sup>

What then separated Dies from his mainstream colleagues? Dies distinguished himself in two ways: in the severity of his proposed solutions and in his language. While the U.S. federal government had deported about 160,000 people between 1929-1935 as part of a concerted repatriation campaign, this was far from sufficient for Dies.<sup>37</sup> In a 1935 speech broadcast on national radio, “America for Americans,” he explained his proposed legislation would immediately close the borders to new immigrants and require the expulsion of all three and one-half million illegal aliens currently in the country and any of the four million legal aliens who did not move swiftly act to become American citizens (statistics that were decried as inflated by his critics).<sup>38</sup> His proposal to deport all immigrants suspected of communist sympathies — a dog whistle for anti-Semitism given his comments on Jewish-Bolshevism — was also extreme when compared to public opinion, where polls indicated only a quarter of Americans supported this position.<sup>39</sup> Dies’ emphasis on across-the-board removal of populations was suggestive of Hitler’s

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<sup>33</sup> U.S. Library of Congress, “Immigrants in the Progressive Era,” accessed August 17, 2021.

<sup>34</sup> Pew Research Center, “How a Different America Responded to the Great Depression,” December 14, 2010; Cantril, *Public Opinion*, 947.

<sup>35</sup> Edwin Harwood, “American Public Opinion and U. S. Immigration Policy,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* Vol. 487, September, 1986), pp. 201-212.

<sup>36</sup> Gallup, “Historical Review: Americans' Views on Refugees Coming to U.S.,” November 19, 2015.

<sup>37</sup> U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, “INS Records for 1930s Mexican Repatriations,” July 29, 2020.

<sup>38</sup> Martin Dies, “America for Americans: Radio address of Hon. Martin Dies of Texas,” May 6, 1935, document C-4-6, The Harry H. Laughlin Papers, Truman State University; Dwight T. Morgan, Secretary of the Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born (New York City) to Dies, June 29, 1935, Box 3, File 20, Dies Papers.

<sup>39</sup> Cantril, *Public Opinion*, 130.

expressed desire in 1919 that the “final aim must be the irreversible removal of the Jews altogether” — meaning wholesale expulsion in order to achieve a *judenrein* nation. While the extremity of Hitler and Dies’ ideas on ethnic cleansing may have been out of step with mainstream opinion in the 1930s, such practices had long been part of the formation of European nations.<sup>40</sup>

Dies’ ethnocentric rhetoric was reminiscent of European fascism. He openly embraced the tactic of demagoguery as a means to extend his power and longevity in office. He even went so far to organize and name himself president of a “Demagogues Club” in the House of Representatives.<sup>41</sup> Dies’ rhetoric and that of his supporters bore similarities to that of European fascists by rigidly distinguishing in-groups and out-groups. Writing in support the Dies’ agenda, William Randolph Hearst editorialized, “good housekeepers wage ceaseless war against vermin.”<sup>42</sup> This emphasis on demonizing out-groups was identified by T.W. Adorno in *The Authoritarian Personality*, as a fundamental precept of fascist discourse. Whereas in-groups received praise, out-groups were subject to negative opinions and hostile attitudes, and were expected to be socially subordinate to the in-group. Considered within the frame of intense nationalism, out-groups were viewed as dangerous and as a threat to the idealized nation. European fascists dealt with their out-groups with solutions ranging from forced expulsion to liquidation. Dies never spoke in these terms regarding Black Americans, as he was satisfied with their subordination and segregation — after all, they were fundamental to the working of the South’s economy; however, for other racial and ideological out-groups his rhetoric more closely mirrored that of the fascists with his emphasis on mass deportations.<sup>43</sup> As discussed below, Dies’ rhetoric caught the eye of the Nazi press. His

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<sup>40</sup> Helmut Walser Smith, *The Continuities of German History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 232-233.

<sup>41</sup> *Dixie Demagogues*, 63; Early on in his career as a congressman Dies remarked how much more profitable it was than working as a country lawyer and expressed his intent to stay in office for as long as possible, see Michael Wreszin, “The Dies Committee,” in *Congress Investigates: A Documented History, 1792-1974*, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. and Roger Burns, eds. (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1975), 2925, [accessed via archive.org].

<sup>42</sup> *San Antonio Light*, “United States Should Clean House,” August 2, 1930, 6.

<sup>43</sup> Adorno, *The Authoritarian Personality*, 102-150.

speeches were reported on positively and his arguments were used to support the racial policies of the Third Reich.

### **6.1.2. Rooting Out Un-Americanism**

After proving his bona fides as a reliable conservative Democrat, Dies received a coveted position on the powerful House Rules Committee in January 1935 with help from fellow Texan Sam Rayburn. This position served as the launching pad for the vehicle that would propel Dies into the national limelight: his appointment to the Special Committee on Un-American Activities (SCUA) in 1938.<sup>44</sup> The SCUA, or the Dies Committee, owed its existence to Samuel Dickstein, a Jewish congressman from New York. As discussed in the previous chapter, Dickstein's treasonous work with the Soviet NKVD represented the only documented case in American history where a congressman was in the employ of a foreign intelligence agency. Contemporaneous with his courting of, and actual employment with the Soviet secret service in 1937 and 1938, Dickstein agitated frequently and vociferously, including pestering Dies for assistance, for a new special investigatory committee to focus on the influence of fascism in the United States.<sup>45</sup> Dickstein's initial attempts to garner support for an encore of the McCormack-Dickstein Committee were generally ignored by his fellow congressmen who interpreted his anti-fascist mania as a by-product of his Jewish ethnicity (son of a Russian rabbi) and his desire for press.<sup>46</sup> That all changed in 1938 concurrent with FDR's war on southern conservatives and his estrangement from Vice President John Garner from Texas. Garner encouraged Dies to submit a resolution to form the SCUA as weapon to use against the

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<sup>44</sup> The Committee was the third special committee created by the House for the purpose of investigating un-American activities in the 1930s. The first was the Fish Committee commissioned in 1930, with the primary purpose to investigate communistic activity in the United States. Next, authorized by the House in 1934, came the McCormack-Dickstein Committee that was catalyzed by the Nazis' accession to power in Germany and was commissioned to report upon both fascist and communist influence in the United States.

<sup>45</sup> Letter from Dickstein to Dies, October 14, 1937, Box 15, Folder 6, Dies Papers.

<sup>46</sup> Michael Wreszin, "The Dies Committee," in *Congress Investigates: A Documented History, 1792-1974*, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. and Roger Burns, eds. (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1975), 2928.

more progressive aspects of the New Deal.<sup>47</sup> This was not the first time Garner and Dies attempted to advance their conservative agenda through the use of a special congressional committee. In 1937, Garner encouraged Dies to introduce a resolution to investigate organized labour and sit-down strikes (it was not successful).<sup>48</sup> By tapping into Americans' fear and hatred of communism, Garner presciently predicted the SCUA would have more influence on American politics than any other committee of Congress.<sup>49</sup> Dies' conservative credentials, as well as Garner's friendship with Dies' father with whom he served in Congress, gave Garner confidence that Dies was the right man for the job. Ironically, Dickstein's efforts in laying the groundwork for the formation of the Committee for the purpose of persecuting fascists to satisfy his Soviet masters was hijacked by Texas conservatives to use as a tool against the New Deal.<sup>50</sup> Three powerful southerners, Speaker of the House William Bankhead, Majority Leader Sam Rayburn, and Vice President Garner, ensured that the Committee would be southern run. These southerners not only blocked Dickstein from a leadership position on the new committee but membership as well.<sup>51</sup>

Dies 'sold' the idea of the committee to his congressional colleagues by highlighting the threat of fascism to America. He provided specifics on the number of German-American Bund camps and Nazi sympathizers in the United States and claimed that fascist sympathizers had advocated the assassination of FDR.<sup>52</sup> He promised that the committee would fairly look at all un-American isms including: "nazi-ism, communism, and fascism," and that "I am not included to look under every bed for a Communist."<sup>53</sup> So convincing was Dies with this sales pitch that fellow Texan, Congressman Maverick,

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<sup>47</sup> Robert E. Stripling, *The Red Plot Against America* (Drexel Hill: Bell Publishing Company, 1949), 21.

<sup>48</sup> Martin Dies, *The Martin Dies Story* (New York: The Bookmailer, 1963), 42.

<sup>49</sup> Harry Truman, *Memoirs: Years of Trial and Hope: Volume Two* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1956), 275.

<sup>50</sup> Goodman, *The Committee*, 19.

<sup>51</sup> On May 26, 1938 the Special Committee on Un-American Activities was authorized by House Resolution 282, and on June 7<sup>th</sup> the House leadership issued notice that Dickstein would be excluded, see *Congressional Record*, 1938, Volume 83 Part 7: 7568-7586; 8392.

<sup>52</sup> *New York Times*, May 27, 1938, 2.

<sup>53</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1938, Volume 83 Part 7: 7569, 7571.

carped that Dies was just serving as a front for Dickstein's rabid anti-fascist position that had been rejected by the House the previous year.<sup>54</sup> Maverick need not have worried, for Dies' promise of a fair and balanced investigation turned out to be empty words.

Early in the life of the Committee, Dies received a message from the Ku Klux Klan stating, "Every true American, and that includes every Klansman, is behind you and your committee in its effort to turn the country back to the honest, freedom-loving, God-fearing American to whom it belongs."<sup>55</sup> During the first two years of its existence (1938-39), Dies pulled a classic bait-and-switch as the Committee spent a preponderant amount of its effort targeting communist activity while only expending a *de minimis* amount of energy to root out fascism.<sup>56</sup> While Dies decried fascism in public, when push came to shove, he did not consider it much of a threat when compared to communism. Communists were especially repugnant to conservative southerners like Dies who reviled their advocacy for unionism and racial equality. Dies' described the communist strategy for gaining influence in the United States as a combination of promoting labour unrest and "discontent among the negroes."<sup>57</sup>

The Dies Committee convened its first formal hearings on August 12, 1938 in Washington D.C.<sup>58</sup> During its first year, approximately eighty percent of the hearings focused on communist activity and twenty percent on fascism. The investigation of communism ranged across its influence within organized labour to the Federal Writer's Project, with testimony provided by a variety of witnesses who sometimes presented undocumented allegations. Dies and the Republican members of the Committee used the

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<sup>54</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1938, Volume 83 Part 7:7574.

<sup>55</sup> Bill Minutaglio, *A Single Star and Bloody Knuckles: A History of Politics and Race in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021), 165.

<sup>56</sup> August Ogden, *The Dies Committee: A Study of the Special House Committee for the Investigation of Un-American Activities, 1938-1944* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University Press, 1945), 52.

<sup>57</sup> Speech by Martin Dies, undated but likely from the late 1930s, Box 1, Folder 31, Dies Papers.

<sup>58</sup> The Committee was comprised of: Martin Dies of Texas, Arthur Healey of Massachusetts, John Dempsey of New Mexico, Joes Starnes of Alabama, Harold Mosier of Ohio, Noah Mason of Illinois, and Parnell Thomas of New Jersey. All were Democrats except for Mason and Thomas who were Republicans.

information garnered from these hearings to cudgel parts of the New Deal and attack a number of administration officials as communist sympathizers.<sup>59</sup>

Seeing the direction the committee was taking, Dickstein denounced the Dies Committee as pro-fascist.<sup>60</sup> Jewish Congressman Sabath wrote Dies complaining about the Committee's lack of focus on fascism.<sup>61</sup> Their criticism was grounded both in their desire that greater pressure be brought to bear on Nazi anti-Semitism and their concern that the focus on communism made American Jews look bad as a result of the widely held belief in Jewish-Bolshevism. Criticism of the Dies Committee came from other quarters as well. President Roosevelt and Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes each issued scathing indictments regarding the Committee's direction.<sup>62</sup> In response to the criticism from FDR, Dies disingenuously dissembled that the Committee had shown no partiality whatsoever between communist and fascist groups.<sup>63</sup> Less polite was his riposte to his personal adversary Ickes. In a scathing letter, Dies wrote, "As soon as it became evident that we were determined to expose communism you conceived a strong dislike for our Committee."<sup>64</sup> Dies asserted his actions were not intended to hurt FDR or the New Deal and that he was just following the data, claiming that he had been working since 1932 to raise awareness about the true designs and nature of the transnational communist movement.<sup>65</sup>

The twenty percent of the hearings in 1938 that addressed fascism were dominated by a sole witness, the Committee's paid investigator, John Metcalfe who was recommend for the job by individuals, unbeknownst to Dies, who were connected with

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<sup>59</sup> Including against David Saposs, the Jewish the chief economist at the National Relations Labor Board. The Committee's attack on Saposs incited Congress to defund his department the following year, see *New York Times*, Nov 21, 1938, 2.

<sup>60</sup> *New York Times*, August 19, 1938, 4.

<sup>61</sup> Letter from A.J. Sabath (D-IL) to Dies, September 21, 1938, Box 15, Folder 7, Dies Papers.

<sup>62</sup> *New York Times*, October 26, 1938, 1; *New York Times*, November 24, 1938, 1, 32.

<sup>63</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1940, Volume 87 Part 1:895.

<sup>64</sup> Dies Files, Letter from Dies to Ickes, November 15, 1938, Box 15, Folder 7.

<sup>65</sup> Speech by Martin Dies, undated but likely from the late 1930s, Box 1, Folder 31, Dies Papers.

the Jewish Anti-Defamation League.<sup>66</sup> In addition to his investigatory duties, Dies utilized Metcalfe as his liaison with the American-Jewish community. Metcalfe testified before the Committee regarding the activities of German-American Bund — knowledge he gained from a six-month stint as an undercover investigative reporter with the *Chicago Daily Times* (Metcalfe infiltrated the Bund under his birth name of Hellmut Oberwinder).<sup>67</sup> On ten separate occasions during 1938, Metcalfe testified before the Committee. Dennis McDaniel in his dissertation presented evidence that Jewish-American leaders financially incentivized Dies to grant this many time slots to Metcalfe. McDaniel presented as evidence a \$2,000 honorarium paid to Dies for a speech to a Jewish organization at time when his average fee was \$50, as well as corroborating testimony from Dies' staff.<sup>68</sup> In support of this theory, the Dies' archive includes a telegram that describes the American Jewish Society's efforts in securing high profile speaking spots for Metcalfe, including with the American Legion, to speak out against fascism.<sup>69</sup> McDaniel's allegation and the associated evidence implies that the twenty percent of Committee's time allocated to fascism would likely have been even less without the incentive of personal remuneration.

With the conclusion of the Committee's activities in 1938, Dies presented a report of the Committee's findings to Congress comprised of seventy-nine pages devoted to communism and just twenty-seven to fascism.<sup>70</sup> The Committee's work was praised by southern congressmen, fascist friendly groups such as the Silver Shirts, and Senator

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<sup>66</sup> *Hearings of the Special House Committee for the Investigation of Un-American Activities, Volumes 1-4* (Washington D.C., Government Printing Office, 1939); Dies, *Martin Dies Story*, 65; Hearings Before the Committee to Investigate Campaign Expenditures, House of Representatives, Seventy-eighth Congress, Second Session, on H. Res. 551, Part 1, August 8, 1944, (Washington D.C., Government Printing Office, 1944), 303.

<sup>67</sup> Hart, *Hitler's American Friends*, 24.

<sup>68</sup> Dennis McDaniel, *Martin Dies of Un-American Activities: His Life and Times*, dissertation, (University of Houston, 1988), 432-433.

<sup>69</sup> Telegram from Earl C. Horan (Port Arthur, Texas) to Martin Dies, March 5, 1939, Box 15, Folder 7, Dies Papers.

<sup>70</sup> *Report on the Investigation of Un-American Activities and Propaganda* (Washington D.C., Government Printing Office, January 3, 1939).

Reynolds' Vindicators.<sup>71</sup> The German-American Bund went on record praising the Committee and recommending its continuation.<sup>72</sup> While conservatives were eager to unleash Dies for another round of investigations in 1939, critics of the Committee lambasted it for its apparent bias and disregard for the rules of evidence. Dies promised his colleagues that he would make changes including the addition of a full-time staff attorney. While better behaved as far as not allowing hearsay into the record, the bias that favoured fascism continued into the following year. The Committee allocated seventy-five percent communism and only twenty-five percent on fascism in 1939.<sup>73</sup>

The emphasis was even more lopsided in his book, *The Trojan Horse in America — A Report to the Nation* (1940), with content that was eighty-five and fifteen percent focused on the threat of communism and fascism respectively.<sup>74</sup> These percentages stand in stark contrast to the outcomes produced by other un-American investigatory committees during the interwar period.<sup>75</sup> At the state level, New York legislators engaged in an investigation of un-American activities via the McNaboe Committee in 1938. Established in 1937 with the ostensible purpose of considering criminal justice reform, McNaboe and his fellow committee members shifted their focus in the May of 1938 to focus on un-American activities.<sup>76</sup> In contrast to the Dies Committee, the language in its final report was split about equally between fascism and communism and the resulting

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<sup>71</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1941, Volume 87 Part 1:894; Michie and Ryhlick, *Dixie Demagogues*, 65.

<sup>72</sup> Ogden, *The Dies Committee*, 110.

<sup>73</sup> Ogden, *The Dies Committee*, 133

<sup>74</sup> Martin Dies, *The Trojan Horse in America — A Report to the Nation* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1940).

<sup>75</sup> Considering those committees that exerted a legitimate effort to examine both fascism and communism. Excluded for example for comparison by this criteria were the Massachusetts' Special Committee to Investigate the Activities within this Commonwealth of Communistic, Fascist, Nazi and Other Subversive Organizations, whose 1938 final report was ninety-eight percent focused on communism, and the McCormack-Dickstein Committee's report that was almost entirely focused on fascism and was authored and edited by an employee of the ADL/ADC Jewish organizations, see *Report of the Special commission to investigate the activities within this commonwealth of communistic, fascist, Nazi and other subversive organizations, Under chapter 32, Resolves of 1937* (Boston, Wright & Potter Printing Co., 1938); Laura Rosenzweig, *Hollywood's Spies: The Undercover Surveillance of Nazis in Los Angeles* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 181.

<sup>76</sup> Lawrence Chamberlain, *Loyalty and Legislative Action: A Survey of Activity by the New York State Legislature 1919-1949* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1951), 59-63.



legislation, the Devany Law, targeted both communists and fascists.<sup>77</sup> Another counterpoint to the Dies Committee's *de minimis* focus on fascism was the California Senate's Factfinding Subcommittee on Un-American Activities (SUAC), or the Tenney Committee. The California legislature commissioned the committee to investigate subversive activities on January 27, 1941, with Assemblyman Jack Tenney as its head. Even though the Tenney Committee was sometimes called the "little Dies Committee," it was more balanced in its investigations. During the seven hearings it held in 1941 before Pearl Harbor, approximately forty percent of its time dedicated to subversive movements was spent on fascism and sixty percent on communism.<sup>78</sup> After the war, the Tenney Committee pivoted to focus almost entirely on rooting out communist activity similar to a host of other state committees.<sup>79</sup>

While Dies' approach earned him disapprobation from some of his colleagues in Congress, the Committee enjoyed widespread support among the American people. Nationally, throughout 1938-39, the Committee sported a seventy-five percent approval rating.<sup>80</sup> At the local level, Dies received overwhelming positive correspondence from his constituents.<sup>81</sup> One wrote, "[I] am strongly in favour of all your acts as Chairman of the Investigating Committee."<sup>82</sup> Another asserted, "I am strong for you in your fight against

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<sup>77</sup> New York State Legislature, Joint Committee on Administration and Enforcement of the Law, John J. McNaboe Chairman, *Report of the Joint Legislative Committee to Investigate the Administration and Enforcement of the Law: Pursuant to Resolution of May 7, 1937, Extended to March 1, 1939, Volume 1* (New York: J.B. Lyon Company, 1939).

<sup>78</sup> Over the course of the seven hearings, three- and one-half days were spent on communism, two- and one-half days on fascism, and one day on other topics, see California Un-American Activities Committees Records, Box 29, California Online Archive.

<sup>79</sup> During the Cold War over a dozen states established their own "little Dies Committees" including: the Broyles Commission in Illinois (1947), Ober Commission in Maryland (1948), and the Canwell Committee in Washington (1947); Walter Gellhorn, *The States as Subversion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1952); M.J. Heale, *McCarthy's Americans: Red Scare Politics in State and Nation, 1935-1965* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 7.

<sup>80</sup> *New York Times*, January 5, 1940, 7; Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 128.

<sup>81</sup> Ted Reynolds (Harrisburg, Texas) to Dies, August 30, 1938, Box 15, Folder 7; Richard Bloss (Beaumont, Texas) to Dies, November 3, 1939, Box 15, Folder 7; Murray Seale (Jasper, Texas), November 3, 1938, Box 93, Folder 11; Charles P. Smith (Henderson, Texas) to Dies, August 19, 1938, Box 93, Folder 12; Dies Papers.

<sup>82</sup> Sam B. Hall (Marshall, Texas) to Martin Dies, November 5, 1938, Box 92, Folder 32, Dies Papers.

un-American activities...”<sup>83</sup> The east Texas branch of The Daughters of the American Revolution praised Dies as “the man of the hour...a boon to the country, God love her.”<sup>84</sup> A local reporter coining a new word to compliment Dies’ efforts wrote, “the ideas of your investigation Committee, was to me true Americanship.”<sup>85</sup> More concerned with results than process, one constituent opined, “It matters little whether your committee and you have made mistakes...the important thing is that you are bringing a vitally important matter to the attention of the public.”<sup>86</sup> Not all letters were positive however. One person wrote, “you were supposed to uncover Naziism (sic) and Fascism along with communism, but the big business boys are lined with the Nazis too close and you dropped them like hot cakes.”<sup>87</sup> This writer was not alone in his conception that the committee was off target. A Gallup poll taken in early 1939 showed that a majority of Americans believed that the investigation of fascism should take precedence over communism.<sup>88</sup> Dies defended his approach, writing, “In fact the lawlessness and violence inspired by Communism in Italy and Germany gave the Dictators an opportunity to seize control of the government. Communism is the forerunner of Fascism.”<sup>89</sup>

### 6.1.3. A Southern Project

While bias of the Dies Committee has been covered at a cursory level in the historiography, the degree to which the Dies Committee was a *southern* project has been overlooked. The southern influence on the Dies Committee can be understood across three dimensions. First, was the southern delegation’s influence in arranging for the

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<sup>83</sup> G.D. Gurley (Pleasanton), October 7, 1938, Box 15, Folder 7; Dies Papers.

<sup>84</sup> Chapter Chairman Elizabeth Simmons (Beaumont, Texas) to Martin Dies, August 29, 1939, Box 15, Folder 7, Dies Papers.

<sup>85</sup> Jack Sharp, publisher of *The Progress* (Anahuac, Texas), October 17, 1938, Box 93, Folder 11, Dies Papers.

<sup>86</sup> District Court Judge Charles J. Dibrell (Galveston, Texas) to Martin Dies, Box 15, Folder 7, February 18, 1939, Dies Papers.

<sup>87</sup> A.C Covington (Beaumont, Texas) to Martin Dies, August 30, 1938, Box 15, Folder 6, Dies Papers.

<sup>88</sup> Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971*, 144.

<sup>89</sup> Martin Dies to A.C Covington (Beaumont, Texas), September 7, 1938, Box 15, Folder 6, Dies Papers.

Committee. Congressman John Rankin of Mississippi refused to vote for the Committee until he was reassured that it would be led by a southerner.<sup>90</sup> Vice President John Garner from Texas masterminded Dies' proposal to create the Committee. Speaker of the House William Bankhead and Majority Leader Sam Rayburn, both southerners, ensured Dies' control of the Committee even though the vast majority of the spadework had been performed by Samuel Dickstein. Speaking of southerners' influence in Congress during the 1930s, Dies wrote, "A great opportunity now lies before us."<sup>91</sup>

Second, Dies ignored the petitions of non-southerners on the committee who requested that Dies suspend activities for a time. When non-southern members, Democrats Dempsey and Healey, objected to how the hearings were being conducted, Dies ignored their complaints.<sup>92</sup> As chairman, Dies had considerable latitude in setting the agenda, selecting witnesses, and determining the procedural rules on questioning and evidence. For instance, when Walter Steele, chairman of a conservative organization, accused six hundred and forty organizations as communist without evidence, Dies allowed the testimony into the record without questioning.<sup>93</sup> When John Frey, a senior official in the AFL, testified that the rival CIO labour organization was riddled with communists there was no cross-examination.<sup>94</sup> On the other hand, Dies exercised sharp questioning skills when an accused communist sympathizer, Ellen Woodward, Assistant Administrator of the Works Project Administration (WPA), testified. When Woodward appeared before the Committee to defend the Federal Writers Project and the Federal Theater, Dies demanded Woodward prove every statement and thoroughly explored her fitness to testify.<sup>95</sup> These are just a few of many instances where Dies demonstrated bias in procedure based on the political proclivity of the witness. President Roosevelt was so

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<sup>90</sup> He was concerned Klan might be improperly investigated because, "after all, the KKK is an old American institution." After Dies left Congress, Rankin authored the resolution that transformed the Dies Committee into the permanent House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC); Goodman, *The Committee*, 19; Michael Newton, *The Ku Klux Klan in Mississippi: A History* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2010), 102.

<sup>91</sup> Dies to Beaumont Mayor E.A. Fletcher, December 17, 1931, Box 90, Folder 24, Dies Papers.

<sup>92</sup> Ogden, *The Dies Committee*, 82.

<sup>93</sup> *Hearings, Volume 1*, 328-337.

<sup>94</sup> *Hearings, Volume 1*, 91-277.

<sup>95</sup> *Hearings, Volume 1*, 1938, Mrs. Ellen Woodward, 2729-2822.

troubled by Dies' investigatory methods that he suggested the reporters covering the hearings be surveyed as to the fairness of the proceedings.<sup>96</sup>

The third element of southern influence manifested through the disproportionate influence of Joe Starnes from Alabama, the only other southerner on the Committee. Starnes served in Congress for five terms from 1935 to 1945 representing a largely rural district in the northern part of Alabama. Starnes, like Dies, was born and raised in the rural South, and held ideologies that embraced individual liberty, white supremacy, nativism, and anti-unionism. It is no surprise that Dies and Starnes found common causes as colleagues in Congress. When Dies introduced H.R. 7120 to deport some six million aliens in 1935, it was Starnes who reported the bill out of committee for Dies.<sup>97</sup>

Starnes vehemently opposed the idea of racial equality and was branded by *Crisis*, the NAACP magazine, as a "vicious racist".<sup>98</sup> Starnes vociferously protested FDR's Executive Order 8802 that aimed to grant defence contractors greater access to African Americans workers. He identified its authors as race agitators determined "to push their dark agenda." In fact, by the early-1940s Starnes had become convinced that the New Deal had been transformed into an attempt "destroy the white civilization" of the South.<sup>99</sup> Similar to Dies, Starnes favoured capital over labour, labelling the CIO as a "left wing radical group." When FDR pushed for a 40-hour workweek and a minimum wage, Starnes countered by introducing a bill that specified a 44-hour workweek and no minimum wage.<sup>100</sup> One reason southerners like Dies and Starnes detested the idea of a minimum wage was because it implied an equal wage for white and Black workers.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Eleven of the eighteen reporters canvassed thought the Committee's procedures were unfair; Ogden, *The Dies Committee*, 85.

<sup>97</sup> U.S. Library of Congress, June 24, 1935, image 2016881234.

<sup>98</sup> Auburn University, *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, accessed May 23, 2021.

<sup>99</sup> Glenn Feldman, *The Irony of the Solid South: Democrats, Republicans, and Race, 1865-1944* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2013), 171-173, 229, 396.

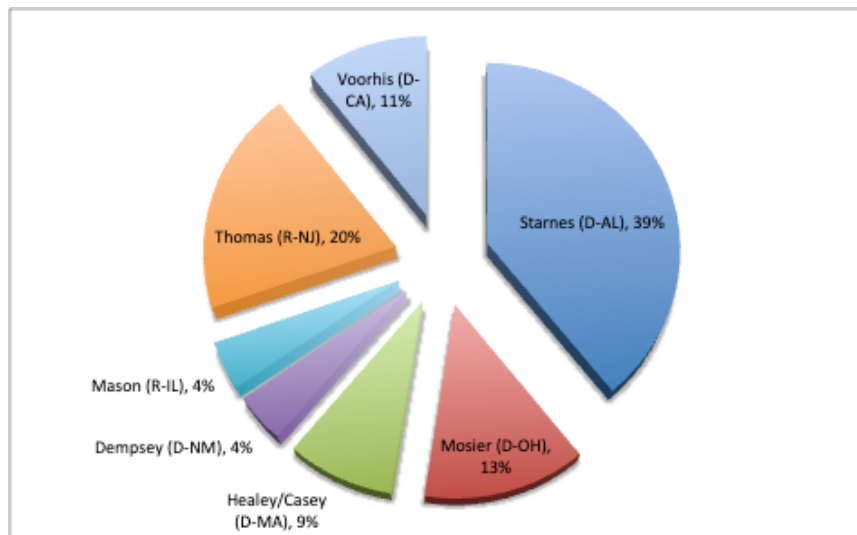
<sup>100</sup> *The Fort Payne Journal* (Fort Payne, Alabama), 12 Jan 1938, 1.

<sup>101</sup> Katznelson, *Fear Itself*, 177.

Like Dies, Starnes exited Congress in 1945 as a result of a labour-funded primary challenger.<sup>102</sup>

Given their shared background and ideology it is no surprise that Starnes served as Dies' right-hand man on the Dies Committee. Although Dies chaired approximately ninety-percent of the one hundred and nine Committee sessions conducted in 1938-1939, when he was not available, more often than not, he appointed Starnes as the interim chairman. Starnes served as the interim chairman eleven out of the fourteen times when Dies delegated control of the Committee. Starnes was also the most outspoken of all the Committee's members, with the exception of Dies. Out of the eight regular Committee members, Starnes conducted thirty-nine percent of the questioning, almost twice as much as the second most vocal member, Representative Thomas, a Republican who seethed political animus towards FDR's administration. Starnes was approximately four times more vocal than any of the non-southern Democrats.

**Figure 13: Percentage of Questions by Dies Committee Members (1938-1939)<sup>103</sup>**



After the Committee was berated for its 1938 pro-fascist tilt, and Dies was threatened with losing its chairmanship, Starnes and Dies recalibrated their approach in

<sup>102</sup> Auburn University, *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, accessed May 23, 2021; "Dies Charges CIO Trying 'To Buy' Ballot," *Beaumont Journal*, April 29, 1944, 3; "Martin Dies," *Beaumont Journal*, May 13, 1944, 3.

<sup>103</sup> *Hearings, Volumes 1-11, 1938-1939.*

1939.<sup>104</sup> Dies arranged for the first month of the Committee's activity to focus on native fascist groups including the questioning Fritz Kuhn the leader of the German-American Bund. Starnes subjected Kuhn to an intense interrogation that at one point became so heated after Kuhn called Starnes a "liar" that Starnes leaped out of his chair with the intention to pummel Kuhn before he was restrained by Capitol police.<sup>105</sup> Despite this theatre, fascism still only occupied a small minority of the Committee efforts in 1939. Starnes played a major role in steering the Committee away from its original purpose of investigating fascism into a vehicle for undermining the New Deal, by serving as Dies' loyal lieutenant. Starnes also exhibited no qualms about the Committee's methods, such as those that were expressed by two of its non-Southern members, Dempsey and Healey. Both threatened to resign from the Committee in 1938, a threat Healey carried through on in 1939.<sup>106</sup> Starnes, on the other hand, supported Dies' decision to carry on as usual and defended him in Congress.<sup>107</sup> Fascist friendly groups such as the Klan delighted in Dies' and Starnes' performance. J. A. Colescott, imperial wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, wrote in the *Fiery Cross* in November 1939, "the nation owes the Dies Committee a vote of thanks."<sup>108</sup>

When the Dies Committee was commissioned, the prevailing opinion among Congress and the general public was that the Committee's primary purpose was the investigation of Nazism and fascism. Congressman John McCormack in a letter to Speaker Bankhead stated the investigation of fascism was, "the primary reason of the House in passing the Resolution of Investigation."<sup>109</sup> When polled, a majority of Americans stated that they expected the Committee to concentrate on fascism.<sup>110</sup> Newspapers and journals echoed these sentiments. The *New York Times* represented the

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<sup>104</sup> *New York Times*, January 8, 1939, E7.

<sup>105</sup> *New York Times*, August 19, 1939, 4.

<sup>106</sup> Ogden, *The Dies Committee*, 119.

<sup>107</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1939, Volume 85 Part 1:1091.

<sup>108</sup> Anne Braden, "HUAC: Bulwark of Segregation," in *A Quarter-Century of Un-Americana* (Marzani & Munsell, N.Y. City, 1963), 19.

<sup>109</sup> Letter to Speaker of the House William B. Bankhead, from John McCormack, June 2, 1938, Box 15, Folder 3, Dies Papers.

<sup>110</sup> Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971*, 144

creation of the Committee as an “attack” on Nazis.<sup>111</sup> Father Charles Coughlin’s *Social Justice* predicted the Committee’s “particular peeve” would be against fascism.<sup>112</sup> Despite these expectations, the southerners on the Committee impelled by a combination of domestic politics and a worldview that in some regards was closely aligned with European fascism, used their influence to direct the committee’s activities away from fascism to chase communists, undermine organized labour, and push back against the more progressive aspects of the New Deal. As one longshoreman union complained, the Dies Committee, “has actually suppressed and ignored abundant evidence” of fascism.<sup>113</sup>

The southerners who contributed to the success of the Dies Committee had an outsized effect on the public discourse. The Committee received over five hundred inches of column space in the *New York Times* in August and September 1938 alone, and by 1939 over eighty percent of Americans stated they were aware of the Committee’s findings.<sup>114</sup> The Dies Committee was not only well known but it was also overwhelmingly popular with the American people with seventy-five percent of the public expressing support for the Committee’s efforts.<sup>115</sup> The combination of high awareness and popularity instrumentalized it to shape the national discourse. Before the Committee began its work, the majority of Americans believed that fascism presented the biggest threat to America. By early 1940, after two years of highly publicized Committee hearings, the numbers had flipped, with now seventy percent of Americans viewing communism as the biggest threat.<sup>116</sup>

Another result of the Committee’s actions was to encourage European fascists. The Nazi press closely followed the hearings and used the findings as source material for propaganda to denigrate the United States and democratic institutions.<sup>117</sup> The German

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<sup>111</sup> *New York Times*, “Nazis in U.S. Put Under Triple Fire,” May 7, 1938, 4; *New York Times*, “House Will Delve into Propaganda,” May 27, 1938, 2.

<sup>112</sup> *Social Justice*, “This Week in Washington,” June 20, 1938, 20.

<sup>113</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1939, Volume 85 Part 1:1050.

<sup>114</sup> D.A. Saunders, “Dies Committee: First Phase,” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 3 No. 2, April 1939, 223-238; Cantril, *Public Opinion*, 164.

<sup>115</sup> Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971*, 195.

<sup>116</sup> *New York Times*, January 5, 1940, 7.

<sup>117</sup> *New York Times*, November 24, 1938.

press also used information from the hearings to support the Judeo-Bolshevik narrative. The *Salzburger Volksblatt* claimed that Dies' investigation had uncovered and proven the Jewish-Bolshevik influence surrounding President Roosevelt, writing "President Roosevelt gathered the biggest Jew led government around him: The biggest the earth witnessed since the Soviet Union."<sup>118</sup> Another Nazi paper joyfully editorialized that "truth finds its way" in response to a comment by Dies that anti-Semitism was increasingly spreading across the United States, including Texas. The *Illustrierte Kronenzeitung* reported quoted Dies as part of a story on how "Aryan" Americans were seeking to change last names that sounded too Jewish.<sup>119</sup> A 1939 article in *Mitteilungen über die Judenfrage*, a newsletter published by the *Institut zum Studium der Judenfrage*, one of the most prestigious Nazi research institutes on the 'Jewish Question,' highlighted the Dies Committee's investigation into Albert Einstein's alleged communist tendencies.<sup>120</sup> Working off a report by Dies to Congress on the activities of Sam Carp, brother-in-law of Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov, the *Kronenzeitung* reported Carp's activities as evidence of the corrupt Jewish-Bolshevik influence surrounding President Roosevelt. Carp had allegedly imported huge sums from the Soviet Union into the United States to buy political influence in the United States.<sup>121</sup>

The Committee's actions also received attention from the fascist press on other topics. The *Salzburger Volksblatt* informed its readers (inaccurately) that the focus of the Dies Committee when it reconvened for its second year in 1939 would be on the role of British and French propaganda in the United States. The article was either purposely written as propaganda or it is possible that the author conflated anti-British sentiments made by other congressmen with Dies' reputation as an isolationist.<sup>122</sup> In another instance, the mouthpiece of the Nazi party, the *Völkischer Beobachter*, reported

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<sup>118</sup> *Salzburger Volksblatt*, April, 28, 1939, 6.

<sup>119</sup> *Bregenzer/ Vorarlbecker Tagblatt*, June 16, 1939, 4; *Illustrierte Kronenzeitung*, June 16, 1939, 4.

<sup>120</sup> Fritz Redlin, "Das Judenporträt: Albert Einstein. Die 'Sehenswürdigkeit' von Princeton," *Mitteilungen über die Judenfrage*, 3 (9 March 1939), 3-4, accessed via Calvin University; U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1940, Volume 86 Part 1:594.

<sup>121</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1940, Volume 86, Part 6: 6301; *Illustrierte Kronenzeitung*, July 31, 1941, 2.

<sup>122</sup> U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 1931, Volume 75, Part 1: 846.



that Dies damaged international relations between the U.S. and Germany when he unfairly questioned a detained German journalist.<sup>123</sup> Dies' activities and statements continued to be a favourite topic for Nazi propaganda even once the United States and Germany were at war.<sup>124</sup> Anecdotal evidence suggests Hitler himself was likely to have been aware of Martin Dies Jr. Hitler's telegram of condolence sent in the wake of a 1937 school explosion in East Texas demonstrates his cognizance of events around Dies' district; indicatively, one can reasonably speculate that Hitler was aware of (and likely encouraged by) the work of Dies and his Committee.<sup>125</sup>

Dies and his fellow southerners hijacked a Congressional committee that was meant to suppress fascism and used it instead as a vehicle to sabotage progressive elements of the New Deal and to defend southern racial and labour practices. The consequences were felt both domestically and internationally. Domestically, the Committee exacerbated tensions between liberal and conservative Democrats to such a degree that Congressman Keefe mused whether the Dies Committee would be responsible for a formal split in the Democratic Party.<sup>126</sup> By focusing on elements of the New Deal they considered non-southern and thus un-American, the Committee and its southern backers sowed enough discord to successfully hinder the passage of additional progressive New Deal reforms in 1938-1939. By helping to shift national discourse to the right, Dies provided not only solace to his conservative Texas constituents but also to European fascists who were encouraged by his activities.

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<sup>123</sup> *Völkischer Beobachter*, August 8, 1941, 3.

<sup>124</sup> *Banater Deutsche Zeitung*, April 1, 1942, 3; *Völkischer Beobachter*, July 7, 1942, 1; *Völkischer Beobachter*, May 25, 1943, 2; *Innsbrucker Nachrichten*, April 20, 1944, 8; *Oberdonau-Zeitung*, August 16, 1944, 1.

<sup>125</sup> "On the occasion of the terrible explosion at the New London, Tex., which took so many young lives, I want to assure your excellency of my and the German people's sincere sympathy," stated the cablegram from Hitler sent the day after the explosion, see *Beaumont Enterprise*, "New London school explosion a part of family's history," March 14, 2016.

<sup>126</sup> Dies Files, Letter to Dies from E.K. Gubin, February 6, 1940, Box 15, Folder 14, Dies Papers.

## 6.2. Hatton W. Sumners: The South as the Answer to Fascism

Hatton Sumners served in the House of Representatives from 1913 to 1947 representing a district in the central region of Texas that included the city of Dallas. During this tenure he was most renowned for his role as chairman of the House Judiciary Committee where he actively worked to block FDR's plan to pack the Supreme Court in 1937. Sumners was a southern man through-and-through. Born in Tennessee to a Scots-Irish family, his father was a cavalry officer in the Confederate army and was named in honour of Confederate General Robert Hatton. On his mother's side, family lore held that the family's fortune had been lost to the plundering of Union troops during the Civil War. Sumners' boyhood was spent working on the family farm. As a teenager he moved with his family to Texas where he took on increasing responsibilities as his father's health began to fail and his family struggled financially. With no money for college, Hatton clerked for a local attorney in exchange for room and board and access to the law books he needed to study to pass the bar. At the age of twenty-two he passed the bar without having taken one formal course.<sup>127</sup>

For such a long-serving and powerful congressman the historiography on Hatton Sumners is surprisingly thin. There exists only a master's thesis from 1972 and a rather short (170 pages) dissertation from 1990. Both focus primarily on Sumners' role in blocking FDR's attempt to pack of the Supreme Court and provide little detail regarding his views on the South's racial state, voting rights, labour relations, and are completely silent regarding his positions on international issues. In addition to these academic works, Sumners' legacy is carried on by a foundation he founded upon his retirement from Congress. As part of the wave of increased racial awareness that swept the country in the wake of George Floyd's death, his foundation shed his name, "Hatton," embarrassed by his rhetoric and actions around racial issues.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Mary Monroe, *A Day in July - Hatton W. Sumners and the Court Reorganization Plan*, Master's Thesis at the University of Texas at Arlington, 1973, 1; Ron Law, *Congressman Hatton W. Sumners of Dallas, Texas: His Life and Congressional Career, 1875-1937*, Dissertation at Texas Christian University, 1990, 7, 16.

<sup>128</sup> SMU Statement Regarding the Sumners Foundation, February 5, 2021.

Sumners serves as an interesting case study into the South's political response to fascism since he was a powerful congressman who was at the forefront of defending southern social structures reminiscent of fascism. He referenced as a point of pride his role in obstructing legislation related to desegregation, anti-lynching, and voting rights.<sup>129</sup> The study of Hatton Sumners' career illuminates another piece of the puzzle of the overall southern tendency for fascist friendly discourse. Sumners provides a prime example of how southerners intellectually reconciled their ostensible dislike of European fascism with their vigorous defence of southern social and racial structures, even as the two systems mirrored each other in many ways.

### 6.2.1. Ideology and Domestic Policies

Conceiving his role of that of champion and defender, Sumner wrote to a friend, "It has been my responsibility almost ever since I have been in Congress to protect the South."<sup>130</sup> A fundamental part of protecting the South for Sumners was preserving its racial order. Correspondingly, Sumners was a staunch advocate of white supremacy — or more specifically, the superiority of 'Anglo-Saxons' — a category in which he grouped English, Scots, Germans, and other Northern Europeans. Since the mid-nineteenth century it had become common to use the term 'Anglo-Saxon' to "describe a vague brotherhood of English-speaking peoples throughout the British Isles and the world."<sup>131</sup>

During the 1920s when scientific racism and the Klan were at their peak, Sumners spoke quite openly regarding his feelings about Black people. He argued that the institution of slavery had benefited Black people because it had introduced them to civilization. He portrayed Black men as lusty brutes saying, "Only a short time ago their ancestors roamed the jungles of Africa in absolute savagery...Somewhere in that black mass of people is the man who would outrage your wife or your child, and every man

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<sup>129</sup> HWS to J. Cleo Thompson, May 17, 1944, box 106, Folder 2.9, Dallas Historical Society's Hatton W. Sumners Collection (hereafter described as HWS Papers).

<sup>130</sup> HWS to J. Cleo Thompson, April 24, 1944, Box 106, Folder 2.6, HWS Papers.

<sup>131</sup> Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of the American Racial Anglo-Saxonism*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 4.

who lives out in the country knows it.”<sup>132</sup> In addition to emphasizing the threat of interracial rape, Sumners often highlighted the difference in what he considered the brilliance of Anglo-Saxon accomplishments (e.g. Magna Carta, English Bill of Rights, U.S. Constitution) to the simplistic nature of Black people by using the metaphor of “jazz thinking.” Distressed that many Americans had begun to abandon traditional cultural norms, he declared, “We have jazzed off into the jungles. We have lost our way... we brought forth our contribution, *My Moon Eyed Baby in Watermelon Time*.”<sup>133</sup> With this not-so-subtle dog-whistle language, Sumners implied that the abandonment of southern racial structures risked the breakdown of white society.

Not surprisingly given his racist views, Sumners, like Martin Dies, was an ardent supporter of Jim Crow as a means to preserve the existing social order. Defending segregation on rail cars Sumner declared, “The South has a hard situation to deal with, both social and political and will countenance no alternation of the code that is not founded upon Anglo Saxon supremacy.”<sup>134</sup> When the federal government proposed providing aid for impoverished school districts, Sumners fretted (correctly) that this expanded federal scope could one day threaten the South’s system of segregated education.<sup>135</sup> Sumners believed that segregation was beneficial to both Black and white southerners by fostering social stability and order, allowing for friendships between individuals of different races. He boasted that thanks to Jim Crow, “violent general interracial conflicts up to this time have been practically unknown,” alluding to the higher frequency of race riots outside the South (e.g. East St. Louis, Chicago) as compared to the South (e.g. Tulsa).<sup>136</sup> His reference to interracial friendships reflected the day-to-day race reality in the South where it was common for individual whites to be polite and friendly to Black people, as long as they remembered ‘their place’ — viz. obeyed and did not complain about Jim Crow strictures. African American Pastor Gilbert Gillum related

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<sup>132</sup> *Congressional Record*, January 26, 1922, Volume 62, Part 2:1785.

<sup>133</sup> *Congressional Record*, December 7, 1932, Volume 76, Part 1:149.

<sup>134</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, “Fight is Waged for State Rail Control,” November 16, 1919, 8. (subscription access via <https://archives.dallasnews.com/>)

<sup>135</sup> HWS to Helen H. Groce, February 5, 1923, Box 71, Folder 1.13, HWS Papers.

<sup>136</sup> *Congressional Record*, April 27, 1944, Volume 90, Part 3:3762-3763.

an example of this southern mindset with a story about how as a teenager he worked side-by-side three white boys at car garage in Kiln, Mississippi. Gillum stated that everyone “got along well,” but when it came time for lunch, he was sent to the back of restaurant to get his lunch while his white co-workers were able to eat at the lunch counter. As long as he did not complain about this arrangement, he was able to keep his friendly relations with his co-workers.<sup>137</sup> Sumners embodied this ideal and prided himself on his many Black friends. He was known to be friendly with individual Black people, and in at least three instances provided job references for Black men.<sup>138</sup>

Sumners, more than any other politician, was the Horatio at the bridge in ‘protecting’ the South from federal anti-lynching legislation. His objection to this legislation was underpinned by three key beliefs. First, lynching served as an effective deterrent to Black-on-white rape. Sumner stated, “I am opposed to this (Dyer) bill because it would increase mob violence by encouraging the crimes which are the most provocative of mob violence.” Second, he argued that lynching was a necessary practice to maintain social stability in the South. Sumners said, “now, I will be very candid with gentlemen about the situation in the South...We all live together. We understand one another. We have established a basis on which we can get along pretty well.”<sup>139</sup> When public opinion indicated that a majority of Americans were in favour of federal anti-lynching legislation, Sumners pivoted from basing his arguments on explicit racism to the concept of states’ rights. He contending lynching was best handled by the criminal justice system at the state level under existing homicide laws, as opposed to new mandates by the federal government.<sup>140</sup>

Sumners had long been an advocate of limiting voting rights for African Americans and poor whites by the application of literacy tests, property requirements, and poll taxes. When Representative Tinkham from Massachusetts derided the South for

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<sup>137</sup> Dr. Gilbert Gillum was the pastor of the Church of the Living Word in Waco, Texas. He made these remarks during a panel discussion on diversity, equity, and inclusion hosted by Vanguard College Preparatory School, October 6, 2020.

<sup>138</sup> HWS to Hon. C.F. O’Donnell, April 24, 1944, Box 106, Folder 2.6, HWS Papers.

<sup>139</sup> Congressional Record, Volume 62, Part 1, January 4, 1922, 797 – 799.

<sup>140</sup> Gallup poll, Oct. 30-Nov. 4, 1937, “Should Congress pass a law making lynching a federal crime?” 71% of Americans and 57% of southerners said yes, see Cantril, *Public Opinion*, 151.

its disenfranchisement of Black voters, stating its constitutional and statutory provisions have the “purpose, intent and effect...to deny the right to vote,” Sumners responded that many northern states also deployed literacy requirements and that a poll tax was not a barrier to voting.<sup>141</sup> When the white primary was ruled unconstitutional by the 1944 Supreme Court case of *Smith v. Allwright*, Sumners prophesized this decision along with other civil rights initiatives would “bring on a serious crisis between white and black people of this country.”<sup>142</sup> When many of his close supporters urged Sumners to fight tooth and nail for a rehearing of the *Allwright* case, he viewed it as a lost cause and strategically decided save his political capital in anticipation of future attacks against the South.<sup>143</sup>

The vast majority of Sumners’ public comments dealt with domestic issues. As a matter of principle, he did not tend to opine on foreign affairs believing this remit to be more properly carried out by the Executive Branch. Asked by a friend about his thoughts regarding the United States’ international policies, Sumners refused to comment, maintaining that the State Department was better informed than he on the specifics.<sup>144</sup> To another constituent he wrote, “on international questions particularly, the first responsibility rests with the executive branch of the government, the less public statements we make the greater chance we have to avoid any unnecessary diplomatic complications.”<sup>145</sup> However, Sumners did leave behind a handful of speeches and letters in which he discussed European fascism. These documents reveal his perspective on fascism and how it interplayed with his vision of the South.

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<sup>141</sup> Sumners Press Release, February 24, 1924, Box 71, Folder 3.4, HWS Papers; Table of voting qualifications by state, 1924, Box 71 Folder 3.5. HWS Papers.

<sup>142</sup> HWS to Hon. C.F. O’Donnell, April 24, 1944, Box 106, Folder 2.6, HWS Papers.

<sup>143</sup> J. Cleo Thompson to HWS, April 11, 1944, Box 106, Folder 2.5; W.M. Holland to HWS, April 14, 1944, Box 106, Folder 2.5; J. Cleo Thompson to HWS, April 19, 1944, Box 106, Folder 2.5; HWS to J. Cleo Thompson, April 24, 1944, Box 106, Folder 2.6, HWS Papers.

<sup>144</sup> Hatton Sumners to Joseph Yates (Dallas), January 19, 1940, Box 87, Folder 3.3, HWS Papers.

<sup>145</sup> Hatton Sumners to J.S. Keene (Dallas), February 21, 1940, Box 33, Folder 8.2, HWS Papers.

### 6.2.2. Natural Law and Fascism

With of his defence of the South's racial order, derailing of anti-lynching legislation, and advocacy of voter disenfranchisement, Sumners embodied many of the aspects that Americans perceived as most emblematic of fascism. The *Saturday Morning Post* reported that Sumners was considered to be a "dangerous Fascist" by liberal Democrats.<sup>146</sup> New York Congressman Marcantonio called Sumner to task for his defence of fascist-like social structures in the South, stating, "as long as any group of people in a democracy or anywhere in the world are deprived of the right to vote, are segregated, Jim Crowed, discriminated against, and treated as second-class citizens, so long will there be unrest." Sumner's rejected Macrcantonio's characterization of the South as pure fiction, and asserted that Jim Crow was a modern marvel, labelling it as "perhaps the outstanding achievement of its kind of all time."<sup>147</sup> Here Sumners, the great defender of southern tradition, revealed his true impulse: modernity was welcomed as long as it was locally crafted and governed for the preservation of traditional ideas — in this case, white supremacy.

What impact did European fascism have on Hatton Sumners and his policy positions? Sumners constructed arguments that derided European fascism as part of his defence of the traditional southern order — ironically, an order that mirrored fascism in many ways. Sumners employed European fascism as a strawman to warn Americans what would befall them if they allowed society to be atomized by special interests (e.g., racial agitators, labour organizers) and abandoned the natural law that he believed was inherent in Anglo-American traditions. In a 1936 campaign speech, he stated, "This country has symptoms of the disease that has attacked Europe, causing the people to lose the power to govern."<sup>148</sup> Sumners argued — as did the conservative authoritarians in Europe who formed interwar autocracies in states such as Austria, Estonia, and Romania — that a traditional hierarchical order with its associated social structures and elites

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<sup>146</sup> *Saturday Morning Post*, "The Gentleman Who Does Not Yield Hatton Sumners, Dallas Diogenes," May 10, 1941, HWS Papers.

<sup>147</sup> *Congressional Record*, June 14, 1944, Vol. 90, Part 5:5972-73.

<sup>148</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, "Sumners Trounces Wild Schemes for Allaying All Ills," July 5, 1936, 1,7.

offered society the most palatable form of protection from the upset of fascist totalitarianism.<sup>149</sup>

When Sumners decried fascism, it was for one major reason — its rule by dictatorship. He was, not surprisingly, silent on other aspects of fascism such as racism and the abridgment of civil liberties. His focus on dictatorship was squarely in frame with the conceptions held by many Americans, as dictatorship was the most commonly criticized feature of fascism in literature and the media during the 1930s. While Sumners' emphasis on dictatorship was aligned with the popular opinion, more unique were his conclusions about the causes of fascism and the implications for the South. According to Sumners, democracies are weakened and primed for fascism when officials and citizens disregard the natural laws (created by "God Almighty") that set the boundaries for good government. He asserted, "governments are themselves governed by natural laws which human beings must respect," and supplanting natural law "by the theories of human beings, initiated by human beings...does not make sense."<sup>150</sup>

Key to his idea of natural law was the ascendancy of local over central government. Sumners explained that natural law was inherent in local governance that limited human discretion. Inspired by two of his favourite Enlightenment thinkers, John Locke and Thomas Jefferson, Sumners contended the decentralization — of power offered society the best protection from the risk of fascist totalitarianism.<sup>151</sup> Sumners argued strong local and state rights were the best way to "fix sound governmental policies" tailored to specific needs of a community.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Weyland, *Assault on Democracy*, 40, 61-64.

<sup>150</sup> HWS speech to General Federation of Women's Clubs in New York City on April 4, 1946, *Vital Speeches of the Day*, Vol. 12, Issue 15, May 1946, 458.

<sup>151</sup> Locke in "A Letter Concerning Toleration" (1689) and *Two Treatises of Government* (1689) outlined a vision where the central government ensures the protection of individual rights and maintains the peace, while local authorities have the power to govern their own communities. Jefferson in the Kentucky Resolution (1798) advocated for the primacy of local over centralized power, see John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, [1689] 1990); John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, [1689] 1988); Library of Congress, Thomas Jefferson, November 16, 1798, Kentucky Resolution.

<sup>152</sup> HWS speech, September 29, 1937, *American Bar Association Journal*, Vol. 23 No. 11, November 1937, 879.



According to Sumners, politicians and bureaucrats violate natural law, viz. the consent of the governed, when they attempt to force ‘enlightened’ ideas on resisting communities and disrupt local traditions. Sumners complained that such officials were deluded by a pretence of knowledge that they could mastermind solutions to ‘fix’ society, and that in fact, these modernist dreams usually make things worse. James W. Scott in his book, *Seeing Like a State*, contended that modernist projects are characterized by appeals to rationality and scientific principles over local knowledge and customs, or *metis*, and that the major catastrophes of the twentieth century such as the mass famines of the Holodomor and Great Leap Forward were caused by powerful coercive centralized governments that disregarded *metis*.<sup>153</sup> Sumners argued for *metis* with the preservation of southern economic and racial practices remarking, “I suggest we ease upon reading books and go out and look at the things that books are written about.”<sup>154</sup> Sumners and other critics of modernism contended that modernist solutions paved the road to fascism since they lacked *metis* and were forced upon an unwilling populace by the full power of an authoritarian state.<sup>155</sup>

More than once, Sumners took to the floor of Congress in an attempt to educate his non-southern colleagues about the practical realities of life in the South in the face of ‘force bills.’<sup>156</sup> Sumners’ constituents applauded his efforts. As one group of fellow Texans wrote him, “why can’t the South be left alone to work its own problems as history proves it has so successfully done?”<sup>157</sup> In this regard, Sumners echoed the thinking of ethnic nationalist Johann Herder who avowed, “the happiness of one people cannot be forced upon any other.”<sup>158</sup> Sumners’ push for strong form local government was not only a matter of principle; it clearly served his political objectives as well. Local governance

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<sup>153</sup> Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 3-6, 88-90, 203.

<sup>154</sup> HWS speech to General Federation of Women’s Clubs in New York City on April 4, 1946, *Vital Speeches of the Day*, Vol. 12, Issue 15, May 1946, 458.

<sup>155</sup> Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 80.

<sup>156</sup> HWS to John Davis (Mesquite) editor of the *Texas Mesquiter*, November 6, 1919, Box 70, Folder 2.1, HWS Papers; *The Birmingham Age*, “Texan Speaks Plainly about Race Issues in South,” February 20, 1919.

<sup>157</sup> Daughters of the Confederacy (Houston Branch) to HWS, May 4, 1944, Box 51, Folder 7.1, HWS Papers.

<sup>158</sup> Quoted in Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1946), 431.

would be a bastion for conservative southerners even as the burgeoning Civil Rights movement at the national level risked positioning these conservatives as a part of a permanent minority. Whether principled or pragmatic, Sumners' push back against modernity was indicative of the southern mindset during the interwar years — modernization was welcomed as part of the New South but only to the extent it was compatible with traditional white southern economic and racial structures.

Another key catalyst for European fascism according to Sumners was the fragmentation of society into special interest groups. Sumners maintained that a country becomes vulnerable to fascism when constant in-fighting between racial and ideological identity groups cause it to devolve from a 'nation-state' into just a 'state.' When the mechanisms of democracy prove inadequate to reconcile bitterly competing interests, a country becomes ungovernable, laying the groundwork for fascism. As an example, Sumner observed that Germany had "no other alternative" to Hitler, and that the German people had made the necessary and appropriate decision in selecting Hitler as their leader as a means of dealing with Germany's unremitting domestic strife.<sup>159</sup> Sumners referred to the Parable of Talents from the Bible to illustrate this point — in other words, failed democracies reaped what they sowed; fascism and dictatorship become inevitable when social agitators use the freedoms inherent within liberal democracies to destroy national harmony. With this line of thinking, Sumners anticipated an argument that would be laid out by Hannah Arendt after World War II in her analysis of totalitarianism. Arendt maintained "totalitarian movements use and abuse democratic freedoms in order to abolish them."<sup>160</sup>

According to Sumners, civil rights advocates who he labelled "race agitators," dangerously weakened the nation by pushing for the reorientation of existing class structures. He considered these efforts not only hazardous but also immoral in a utilitarian sense, as the result was a harm to the vast majority for the benefit of just a

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<sup>159</sup> HWS speech to the Junior Bar Conference on April 2, 1938, *Vital Speeches of the Day*, Vol. 4, Issue 14, May 1938, 442.

<sup>160</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, [1951] 1973), 312.

narrow slice of the population.<sup>161</sup> Sumners warned that the United States could only avoid this dangerous atomization if its citizenry discarded “jazz thinking” and adhered to what he believed were traditional racial, economic, and political social structures that hitherto provided stability. Here again, Sumners anticipates Arendt; she claimed that fascism benefits when the class structure breaks down resulting in a society of “atomized, isolated individuals.”<sup>162</sup> Bereft of their classes, people became inwardly isolated from society and prone towards “violent nationalism” and subject to total domination by the state.<sup>163</sup>

Sumners suggested that America had been able to avoid fascism so far because it had been founded on Anglo-American principles. However, he was worried that the United States was at risk from the same forces at work in fascist Europe because the American people were beginning to abandon these ideals. When speaking about Anglo-American principles, Sumners is revisiting his argument about natural law but with different phraseology. He claimed it was an Anglo-American principle to delegate governmental authority to the local level as much as possible in order to maximize opportunities for ordinary citizens to take part in the exercise of power in order to amplify accountability among the general public.<sup>164</sup> In other words, states’ rights are fundamental to guarding against dictatorship and fascism. Not surprisingly, Sumners’ advocacy for states’ rights also foundationally underpinned his arguments in favour of southern practices regarding lynching and voting rights. While Sumners believed power was best devolved to individuals at the local level, he did not mean *all* individuals. He was concerned that power should only be wielded in the service of “an intelligent, advised public opinion” that was best realized by the disenfranchisement of Blacks and poor whites.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> *Congressional Record*, April 27, 1944, Volume 90, Part 3:3762-3763.

<sup>162</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 323.

<sup>163</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 317-320.

<sup>164</sup> HWS speech to the Junior Bar Conference on April 2, 1938, *Vital Speeches of the Day*, Vol. 4, Issue 14, May 1938, 442.

<sup>165</sup> HWS speech on September 29, 1937, *American Bar Association Journal*, Vol. 23 No. 11, November 1937, 878.

Sumners engaged in the discourse of fascism by using Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy as constructs to support his arguments for the continuance of southern folkways. Sumners warned that the meddling of an overly intrusive modernist federal bureaucracy was degrading America's natural resistance to fascism by undermining local governance in the South. Naturally disposed to the concept of states' rights, Sumners exposed a confirmation bias by zeroing in on the dictatorship facet of fascism to the exclusion of its other characteristics. He warned that agitation against southern practices would sow the field for fascism by polarizing the citizenry into opposing camps with identity politics. Demonstrating a truly agile worldview, he used the threat of fascism as the logic for maintaining the racial, labour, and political fascist-like practices in the South.

Sumners argued that protecting the South was in the "public interest" since it was the last great bastion of Anglo-American traditions while the rest of the country had "jazzed off into the jungle" with unconventional thinking that was antithetical to natural law.<sup>166</sup> He warned Americans they risked losing all their freedoms by being "contemptuous of history" and casting off traditional morés that had long provided social stability.<sup>167</sup> Just as many Europeans choose fascism as a means of preserving order in response to Bolshevism and the Great Depression, Sumner and other conservative white southerners reached for Jim Crow and segregation as part of a 'search for order' in the face an increasingly urbanized and restive Black population during the interwar years. Ironically, with this train of logic, Sumners argued the only way to avoid fascism was by supporting the continuance of the southern practices widely perceived as mirroring fascism.

### **6.3. Sam Rayburn: Southern Practices and the American Way**

Sam Rayburn, the longest serving Speaker of the House, shared many characteristics with his colleague Hatton Sumners: both originally hailed from Tennessee,

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<sup>166</sup> HWS to Sam P. Harben, June 8, 1944, Box 106, Folder 2.10, HWS Papers.

<sup>167</sup> HWS speech to the American Bar Association October 14, 1932, "Are We Observing the Natural Laws that Govern Government?" *American Bar Association Journal* Vol. 18 No. 11, (November 1932): 747.

were sons of Confederate soldiers, grew up on farms in modest circumstances, were first elected to Congress in 1912, and failed to enjoy the bosom solicitude of marriage.<sup>168</sup> Whilst similar in many ways, they differed in their reaction to European fascism. Whereas Sumners comfortably reconciled the embrace of southern practices on one hand and the dismissal of fascism on the other, Rayburn over time manifested a greater degree of cognitive dissonance. Before World War II, Rayburn occupied the same rhetorical ground as Sumners, concurrently praising southern practices while lambasting fascism. After the war, these conflicting positions became increasingly untenable for him, as they did for many Americans.

With fascism totally defeated and discredited post war, its disgrace became a powerful lever in the hands of liberals to pry loose the southern social and economic structures they found offensive. As the hypocrisy of simultaneously holding pro-South and anti-fascist worldviews became more glaring, it became increasingly difficult for politicians of national stature like Rayburn to defend one while reviling the other. This tension ironically made fascism — by way of the opposition it produced — an important catalyst for the advancement of civil rights. During the Cold War, nationally prominent southerners were pressured to shift their stance on civil rights by geopolitical considerations. Mary Dudziak argued in her book, *Cold War Civil Rights*, that America's racial practices, particularly those found in the South, represented a huge propaganda liability and correspondingly was an important factor why both Democratic and Republican administrations supported the advancement of civil rights in the first decades of the Cold War.<sup>169</sup>

Although Rayburn did not order his personal papers destroyed, he left behind only a scant amount of material in his archives as a reference to explore his thoughts and ideas on fascism or any other topic. Adding to the difficulty of ferreting out his inner beliefs, Rayburn was in the habit of choosing his words carefully. Referring to President “Silent” Calvin Coolidge’s adage, “a man never has to explain something he didn’t say,” Rayburn

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<sup>168</sup> While Rayburn was married for less than three months, Sumners never married.

<sup>169</sup> Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton University Press, 2000), 3-17.

remarked, “[it was] about the wisest thing I ever heard outside the Bible.”<sup>170</sup> He avoided making speeches about controversial topics such as lynching and Jim Crow and his papers are dominated by anodyne domestic economic and regulatory issues. However, there is a thread that emerges from the remnants he left behind. Whenever he denounced fascism, Rayburn contrasted it to what he thought was best about America: opportunity, democracy, and liberty for all citizens. The following highlights the dissonance between Rayburn’s disapprobation of fascism and his acclaim of the South, and how the cognitive tension between these two mindsets contributed to his later support for civil rights.

Rayburn began his political career sounding a lot like Martin Dies Jr. and Hatton Sumners. He championed states’ rights and identified immigrants as harbingers of anarchy.<sup>171</sup> He defended Jim Crow and promoted white supremacy.<sup>172</sup> He excused the lynching of a Black man in his district by noting the “negro had committed an unspeakable crime against the virtue of a white woman.”<sup>173</sup> Rayburn’s rhetoric became less dogmatic in the late 1930s, and began to evidence a degree of cognitive dissonance. Rayburn gave two speeches less than in a year apart in 1936 and 1937 that highlighted this dynamic. In one, he praised the Confederacy, lamented how white southerners were abused after the war, and lauded the heroics of Nathan Bedford Forrest, the first Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>174</sup> In another, he painted a vision of America as a place where “there is fair play, honesty in dealings, where prosperity and peace will come to remain among *all* [emphasis added] our people.”<sup>175</sup>

Rayburn’s worldview was similarly stressed when confronted with European fascism. He characterized European fascist states as oppressive tyrannies and deplored

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<sup>170</sup> Sam Rayburn, “Advice to Young People,” c.1963, Box 3R284, Sam Rayburn Papers at UT Austin Briscoe Center for American History (cited hereafter as the Rayburn Papers); Hardeman and Bacon, *Rayburn: A Biography* (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1987), 118.

<sup>171</sup> Sam Rayburn, Letter in the *Bonham Daily Favorite*, July 7, 1916.

<sup>172</sup> Hardeman and Bacon, *Rayburn: A Biography*, 113.

<sup>173</sup> Sam Rayburn, “The Lynch Mob in Sherman,” 1929, Box 3U92, Rayburn Papers.

<sup>174</sup> Sam Rayburn Speech at Confederate Memorial Day Services, Arlington Cemetery, June 6, 1937, Box 3U92, Rayburn Papers.

<sup>175</sup> Sam Rayburn, Speech of the Hon. Sam Rayburn Accepting the Temporary Chairmanship of the Democratic State Convention at San Antonio, Texas May 26, 1936, Box 3U92, Rayburn Papers.

their system of government as evil. In order to avoid it in America, he called for a society that “brings opportunity and security to the common man” and a government that represents “all of the people.”<sup>176</sup> Citing the lack of democracy as one of the worst aspects of fascism, Rayburn called for broader enfranchisement, stating, “every American citizen should vote in every election.”<sup>177</sup> The effort of defending southern social structures while simultaneously condemning fascist countries as ‘evil’ for denying liberty and dignity to its citizens, caused Rayburn for the first time, according to his biographer, to become “uncomfortable, vaguely embarrassed” on this moral issue.<sup>178</sup> Some historians claim LBJ’s depression and tendency to self-medicate had similar roots.<sup>179</sup>

They were not alone; the fight against European fascism greatly changed the discourse in the United States. One indication was the articulation by Black soldiers for a ‘double V’ – victory over fascism abroad and against discrimination at home. Walter White pointed out the hypocrisy of “an army presumably trained to fight against Hitler’s theories of race while it practiced a similar philosophy.”<sup>180</sup> This sentiment, combined with the widely published post-war revelations about human right abuses and genocide committed by fascist governments, contributed to a dramatic undermining of support for southern social structures as documented through a number of opinion polls. The number of white Americans who agreed that “negroes” were as intelligent as white people rose by ten percentage points from 1942 to 1946. Support for segregation fell by eight percentage points between 1942 and 1949. Those expressing anti-Semitic sentiments dropped in half during this time period.<sup>181</sup>

How much of this shift in public opinion can be attributed to disgraced fascism? After the war, civil rights advocates unrelentingly expatiated on the syllogism that tied together European fascism and the South. Even the Nazis on trial at Nuremberg argued

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<sup>176</sup> Sam Rayburn, “Dallas Testimonial Speech,” 1940, 3U92, 5, 9, Rayburn Papers.

<sup>177</sup> Sam Rayburn Speech, Citizenship Recognition Day, May 18, 1941, Box 3U93, Rayburn Papers.

<sup>178</sup> Hardeman and Bacon, *Rayburn: A Biography*, 332.

<sup>179</sup> David Goldfield, “Border Men: Truman, Eisenhower, Johnson, and Civil Rights,” *Journal of Southern History* Vol. 80, No. 1 (February 2014): 12-13.

<sup>180</sup> Walter White, *A Man Called White*, 190.

<sup>181</sup> Rita Simon, *Public Opinion in America: 1936-1970*, 57, 62, 101.

that the racial theories articulated in the U.S. constituted a mitigating factor for their clients<sup>182</sup> Based on the propositions that fascism was un-American and that the South mirrored fascism, the inevitable conclusion was that southern social structures must be uprooted and defeated as were the fascist dictators. Langston Hughes in his article, “Nazi and Dixie Nordics” considered defusing the “mass psychosis” of southerners a task equal to cleansing Germany of Nazi ideology.<sup>183</sup> Civil rights groups referenced the Holocaust and revelations from the Nuremberg Trials in their appeal to the newly formed United Nations for southern practices to be addressed by its newly established Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide.<sup>184</sup> A few years later, the Civil Rights Congress presented the arguments made by Robert Jackson, the United States’ Chief Prosecutor at Nuremberg, as part of its petition asking for the United Nations to condemn southern practices.<sup>185</sup> Jackson himself, as a Supreme Court Justice, in a letter to a friend directly connected his experience at Nuremberg to his vote on the *Brown v. Board of Education* case in 1954 that outlawed segregation in public schools — a decision that greatly aggravated many white southerners.<sup>186</sup> The international community picked up upon the theme, and America’s Cold War geopolitical adversaries, the Soviets and Chinese, frequently attempted to discredit America by comparing the social structures of South with those of Nazi Germany.<sup>187</sup> The United States’ race problem, especially as rooted and highlighted in the South, was a fundamental impediment to its post war Cold War struggle.

The struggle against European fascism led to a redefinition of what it meant to be American — a shift in the discourse that altered the course of southern cultural and

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<sup>182</sup> Harvard University, *Nuremberg Trial Transcripts*, HLSL Item No.: 2703, Exhibit Code: Brandt, K. 57; Oswald Pohl testimony on September 22, 1947.

<sup>183</sup> Langston Hughes, “Nazi and Dixie Nordics,” *Chicago Defender*, March 10, 1945.

<sup>184</sup> Willard Townsend, “The Other Side: Genocide, the Word is New But the Music is Old,” *Chicago Defender*, October 25, 1947.

<sup>185</sup> Civil Rights Congress, *We Charge Genocide: The Historic Petition to the United Nations for Relief from a Crime of the United States Government Against the Negro People* (1951. New York International Publishers, 1970), xii.

<sup>186</sup> Norbert Ehrenfreund, *The Nuremberg Legacy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 135-136.

<sup>187</sup> Richard Lentz and Karla K. Gower, *The Opinions of Mankind: Racial Issues, Press and Propaganda in the Cold War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2010), 36, 139-144, 200.



institutional development. Even conservative entertainers like Frank Sinatra contributed to the change in conversation. The lesson of his 1942 film, *The House I Live In*, was that racial intolerance was a Nazi characteristic. Sinatra sang “all races and religions, that’s America to me.”<sup>188</sup> Sam Rayburn began singing this same song in his role as a national leader as America’s conflict with fascism heated up during the interwar period, even though it conflicted with his traditional worldview as a southerner. Eventually his behaviour shifted correspondingly as evidenced by his jamming through, at President Truman’s insistence, of a civil rights plank in the Democratic Party’s platform in 1948 in spite of the vociferous protests from his fellow southern delegates.<sup>189</sup> Rayburn’s primary motivation in trampling over his fellow southerners was undoubtedly loyalty to Truman as the head of the Democratic Party. But as a man who had a history of standing firm to his principles, Rayburn’s actions also reflected a fundamental change in his thinking. Like a growing number of other Americans, Rayburn found it increasingly difficult to defend southern social structures after cheering on a war against fascism.

#### 6.4. Conclusion

The case studies of Dies, Sumners, and Rayburn highlight how southern politicians utilized the discourse of fascism to promote their personal and political agendas and how America’s experience with fascism undermined illiberal practices of the South. Dies’ investigation propelled him from a relatively unknown Texas congressman to a national figure in just a few years. His activities gave him influence ranging from Hollywood to the American Jewish community that he used to personally enrich himself and extract favours. He derailed America’s most visible interwar investigation into fascism, and in doing so provided encouragement to European fascists who cheered on his activities. Dies was emblematic of southern politicians who utilized the topic of fascism to opportunistically increase their own wealth or political power. Huey Long, Bob Reynolds and Joe Starnes also fit in this category.

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<sup>188</sup> *The House I Live In*, directed by Mervyn LeRoy (RKO Radio Pictures, 1945).

<sup>189</sup> Hardeman and Bacon, *Rayburn: A Biography*, 337.

Sumners, as part of his steadfast defence of the traditional South, in an ironic twist, highlighted the dangers of fascism as a justification to preserve southern social structures that were widely perceived as being akin to fascism. His actions were illustrative of those southerners such as Jack Garner and John Rankin who found fascism a useful strawman to undermine the more progressive elements of the New Deal and defend reactionary southern practices. While Rayburn, like many of his southern colleagues, did not have much to say on the record about fascism, the little he did express highlighted the growing moral quandary he and other Americans experienced as it became increasingly clear that many of the practices of European fascism were not far from the reality for Black people in the United States, especially in the South. Rayburn's actions fit alongside southerners such as Harry Truman and Lyndon B. Johnson who foreshadowed the future of the region with a reoriented worldview of civil rights and liberties.

To what extent is it reasonable to divine the actual intentions of these politicians from their discourse? Was their rhetoric calculated to maximize their political capital or was it an expression of their political convictions? Unfortunately, this is a fundamental problem in analysing most politicians and especially those who hold power in democratic systems. Each of these politicians lambasted fascism as un-American in their speeches, even as their actions, with the exception of Rayburn later in his career, were focused on maintaining fascist like practices. They cherry-picked the elements of fascism that were convenient for their agendas and were generally either indifferent or oblivious to the reflection of European fascism on the South. To the extent that southern politicians, like the three examined, expressed words without actions regarding fascism during the interwar years — beholden as they were to their the entrench social structures supported by their constituents — then it is reasonable to conclude that the quantitative discourse analysis presented in Chapter Five that measured the South's relatively friendly and encouraging voice as compared to non-southerners, underrepresents the actual degree of accommodation provided by the South for European fascism. In other words, the case studies imply that the South's distinctive accommodation and encouragement of European fascism occurred to a greater degree than indicated by the raw numbers alone.

## 7. Summary and Conclusions

In the sweltering heat of a Mississippi summer day in 1965, the white residents of Greenwood, a town in the state's heavily Black populated Delta region, found a letter taped to their front doors. Penned by a local organization that identified itself as "Concerned Patriots," the authors decried as a calamity the failure of the region's elites to stave off the Civil Rights Movement. The message expressed disdain for the federal government and its ever-increasing number of administrative bureaucrats who seemed hell-bent on upsetting the South's social order to a degree not seen since Reconstruction. The letter, one in a series titled "A Delta Discussion," was triggered by a wave of legislative and court orders that mandated the dismantling of the South's existing racial and political social structures.<sup>1</sup> Despite their frustration with how the world was changing, the writers did not advocate violence but rather urged their fellow southerners to adopt populist tactics such as voting drives and economic boycotts against local "scalawags" as means to protect their southern heritage.<sup>2</sup> This populist, rather than violent approach, was all the more noteworthy given that white residents the Delta historically represented the "hard core of the political South" responsible for setting the dominant political tone for the region since the Civil War.<sup>3</sup>

The letter's message was an indicator that white southerners who clung to the region's traditional socio-economic structures, despite having suffered grievous blows by the Civil Rights movement, planned on taking their fight underground. It would now be fought as a series of decentralized right-wing populist movements. An optimist may opine that the long arc of history bends towards justice and that may well be true, but it is a bumpy ride. The Hegelian dialectic prescribes that a winning idea will be challenged by

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<sup>1</sup> *Smith v. Allwright* (1944); *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954); Twenty-fourth Amendment (1964); Civil Rights Act of 1964; Voting Rights Act 1965.

<sup>2</sup> These letters were delivered to the house of the author's father-in-law who preserved a copy of letter four in the series; The full series can be found in Duke University Libraries, "A Delta Discussion" newsletter, Issues 1-4, Ku Klux Klan collection, 1916-1987 and undated, Box 1.

<sup>3</sup> Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, 5.

an antithesis, and that winners at any point in history must always be prepared to face challenges from rivals, who are often yesterday's losers.

The fundamental geographic division in U.S. politics has traditionally been a sectional conflict setting the North against the South. The dynamic between the South and the rest of the country has shifted in the twenty-first century such that southern ideas are no longer contained by the region's geography. Now, partisan differences between urban and rural residents are more substantial than what exists between city dwelling northerners and southerners. Correspondingly, southern ideas and symbols have been adopted by rural opponents of progressive policies. The Confederate flag is no longer strictly a regional symbol and now can be seen in rural areas from Maine to Minnesota. It was flown at Donald Trump rallies as well as during the January 6th Capitol Hill riot. Those who understand the display of the Confederate flags (only) as a sign of 'white insurrection' miss the point. It has a more amorphous meaning for those who embrace it — it has also become a symbol of populism and opposition to elites. Its adoption by rural Americans does not indicate that the American countryside increasingly wants to resurrect the *antebellum* South, but rather that its residents share the historic South's distrust of the federal government, hostility to technologically driven change, respect for local law enforcement, and a keen sensitivity to the unwinding of the traditional racial hierarchy. The South provides ready-made ideas and iconography that encompass this worldview.

The contemporary South holds fast to some of the ideas that caused it to be compared to fascist Europe during the interwar years. A subtle white racism still blankets vast swaths of the region, especially in rural areas, even among the educated class. The South is the headquarters for the cultural battle against the teaching of what its detractors label "critical race theory." Southern governors led the resistance against the expansion of federal healthcare under President Obama and President Biden's COVID public safety measures in the name of states' rights. President Trump chose Waco, Texas, an area he considers to be quintessential "Trump Country," as the launch site for his 2024

presidential campaign.<sup>4</sup> In 2021, Texas Senator Ted Cruz openly discussed the possibility of Texas secession with a group of university students. In a serious discussion, he laid out the criteria for what it would take for Texas to secede. If the country continued to move in the “wrong” direction, Cruz stated “I think we take NASA, we take the military, we take the oil.”<sup>5</sup> Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene from Georgia roiled the same waters in 2023 with a high-profile tweet storm calling for a national “divorce.” She argued that the United States had in effect become ungovernable as a result of irreconcilable cultural and political differences between conservatives and progressives.<sup>6</sup>

Southern ideas and iconography have spread internationally as well. At far-right rallies across Brazil in 2021, followers of President Bolsonaro flew the Confederate flag while wearing cowboy hats and belt buckles emblazoned with Texas longhorns.<sup>7</sup> This was not the first time the South has exported Confederate ideas to Brazil. After the Civil War, thousands of defeated Southerners attracted by the opportunity to own slaves again emigrated to Brazil. Along with their agricultural skills, the *confederados* also brought their southern ideology of white supremacy and racial violence.<sup>8</sup> In Canada, the Confederate flag was waved by supporters of the ‘Freedom Convoy,’ a movement that started with Canadians protesting governmental vaccine mandates in 2022, that morphed into an anti-establishment protest and occupation.<sup>9</sup> In Italy, the Confederate flag is sometimes flown by soccer fans in southern Italy. It is associated with the activities of patriot Giuseppe Garibaldi because of the perceived historic parallels of ‘culturally backward’ southerners fighting against more powerful northern regimes. Rooted in their

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<sup>4</sup> Texas Tribune, “Former President Donald Trump’s first 2024 campaign rally will be in Waco,” March 17, 2023.

<sup>5</sup> *Newsweek*, “Ted Cruz Wants Texas to Secede if U.S. Comes to a 'Point Where It's Hopeless',” November 8, 2021; *Salon*, “Ted Cruz says Texas should secede and “take the military” if Democrats “destroy the country,” November 9, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> <https://twitter.com/mtgreene/status/1628062900345602048>

<sup>7</sup> *Washington Post*, “Some Bolsonaro supporters have called for a military takeover of Brazil,” September 27, 2021.

<sup>8</sup> *Washington Post*, “They lost the Civil War and fled to Brazil. Their descendants refuse to take down the Confederate flag,” July 11, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> *Wall Street Journal*, “Ottawa Fears Vaccine Protest Has Morphed Into an Occupation,” February 4, 2022.

own historic North / South conflict, Irish soccer fans also sometimes wave the Confederate flag as a symbol of resistance against British occupation of Northern Ireland. In Russia, some of Vladimir Putin's supporters wear the Confederate flag as a symbol of freedom.<sup>10</sup> Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, upon visiting the South in August 2022 to deliver a speech that praised traditional family and gender roles, exclaimed to the crowd's immense delight, "The globalists can all go to hell. I have come to Texas" and "God Bless Texas!"<sup>11</sup> The South continues to be a stand-in for right wing populist sentiment even though its history is more complicated.

The questions explored in this thesis are pertinent to contemporary society given the forces battering the well-being of liberal democracies. Within the United States, the South and its politicians once again represent the primary bastions of resistance to progressive ideas. While many of the South's socio-economic structures have been eroded down below the water line, they are in many cases still deeply still embedded in the culture wrapped within the principles of libertarianism and states' rights. The South serves as an incubator for these ideas, developing and nurturing them, and propagates their spread to right-wing movements throughout the country and around the world. Southern symbols and ideas have metastasized and are now used globally by the right. The South may have been militarily conquered and its Jim Crow laws may have been banished, but region still serves as a seed-bank for the ideas and practices that underpinned the conception of the South as America's fascist region during the interwar period.

In the early twentieth century, most Americans considered fascism to be a foreign ideology that was antithetical to their values. When the fascist states became an existential threat to the liberal democratic order, the United States in conjunction with its allies, undertook their destruction. Fascism, in other words, was perceived by most in the United States as 'un-American' much like communism. Even so, it is naïve to conceive

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<sup>10</sup> Karin Crelling, "The Confederate Battle Flag: Why is it perceived so differently in the US and Europe/Germany?" (Thesis, University of Washington, 2019), 54-55.

<sup>11</sup> *Breaking911* on Twitter, <https://twitter.com/i/status/1555312282011418631>, August 4, 2022; *Zerohedge*, "Less Drag Queens, More Chuck Norris": Orbán Rocks CPAC Texas," August 5, 2022.

that an ideology that captured large portions of Europe in the 1930s did not leave its mark on the United States. This dissertation tells the story of how fascism through the channel of southern discourse shaped aspects of American politics. When the interwar South engaged in or shared the practices of fascism it became more than just an out-of-step region of the United States — but rather part of a larger and broader interwar network that fostered white superiority and reactionary public policy. W.E.B. Du Bois insightfully observed that the dominant theme of twentieth-century would be the “colour-line.”<sup>12</sup> Within this context, this dissertation describes how the South was part of an international tide of white supremacy and illiberal governance during the interwar years.

The contributions of this dissertation are the interventions it makes in the historiography of southern and U.S. history and transnational fascism. This project explained the genesis and progression regarding how fascism impacted the long tradition of southern criticism. During the interwar years, the South was widely perceived by a host of liberal observers as a region that mirrored many of the key practices inherent in European fascism. Labour activists and then Black authors were the first to link the South to the wider phenomena of European right-wing authoritarianism. Later this charge was echoed by white journalists and politicians. Southern apologists dismissed this critique as typical anti-southern bias that had been a cottage industry since the mid-nineteenth century.

The disparagement of the ‘fascist’ South provided a convenient scapegoat for non-southerners to redirect attention from the injustices perpetuated in their own regions since racism, labour violence, and corrupt democratic practices were not unique to the South during the interwar period. Nonetheless, this dissertation argues that the South was distinct from the rest of the United States by the degree to which it shared commonalities with fascist Europe. German elites admiringly studied the South’s plantation system as a model for the country’s domestic labour force and actively copied it for its cotton producing African colonies. There were shared conceptions of how to extract maximum surplus value from racially ‘inferior’ Polish and Black rural workers. Just as the hatred of

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<sup>12</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: New American Library, 1903), 10, 29.

Bolshevism fired European fascist violence against organized labour, white southerners' brutal response to organized labour was supercharged due to the involvement of communist-linked activists who tried to organize across racial lines. There were also distinct parallels related to political rights. Even the South was not a dictatorship *per se*, southern elites circumscribed democracy by establishing a one-party state and disenfranchising a substantial percentage of the region's Black and poor white population — actions backed up by the full power the state and the threat of vigilante violence. Similar to how Wittgenstein thought about 'family resemblances,' while all the traits between the South and the fascist states were not the same, enough of them shared a likeness to merit a common classification.<sup>13</sup>

Building upon the work of Brinkmeyer, Grill, Jenkins and others, this project expands the historiography to describe the southern political response to fascism. Southern politicians exhibited a unique and differentiated behaviour as compared to non-southerners on the topic of fascism. Whether self-aware of their motivations or not, the cultural patterns of their region informed the southern delegation's rhetoric and actions.<sup>14</sup> Their rhetoric around fascism demonstrates that the South was the region most sympathetic to the European fascist regimes and some of the key practices of fascism. The South's political response was marked by a decade-long pattern of refusing to criticize fascist Europe and its penchant to defend it that established a discursive framework for distinct and pivotal voices, time-and-time again southern, to operate on the fringes.

This thesis contributes to the historiography of the United States by detailing how the distinct southern response to fascism affected both domestic and international policy. The biggest problem southern congressmen had with fascism was not the persecution of minorities and suppression of organized labour, but rather how it centralized power to impede individual rights; a sentiment similar to that of Confederate secessionists regarding the Union before the Civil War. Domestically, the South's political response to

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<sup>13</sup> Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 32.

<sup>14</sup> Adorno, *The Authoritarian Personality*, 6.



fascism limited the scope of the New Deal; globally, it encouraged admirers of fascism and acted as a drag on the United States' ability to contain European fascism on the international stage. The southerners who advocated for fascist practices at home and cheered them abroad had influence in the United States government longer than Hitler did in Germany. This finding overturns the current historiographical consensus that the South did not have a distinct political response to fascism.

The focus on the South's meso-level politicians revealed the tightrope they walked between decrying fascism as un-American while simultaneously defending southern practices akin to fascism. Caught between the patriotic rhetoric of national level southern politicians and the inherent biases of their local constituents, the discourse of southern meso-elites was guarded, but subtly pro-fascist. While southerners did not embrace European fascism *per se*, the analysis indicates that they were comfortable with many of its practices. They utilized the discourse of fascism to protect traditional southern social structures and advance conservative public policy until it became untenable to continue doing so in the post war period.

This dissertation also contributes to the historiography of transnational fascism. Previous disparate research was consolidated and new evidence was presented regarding the exchange of ideas between the South and fascist Europe. U.S. Congressional rhetoric influenced the thinking and decisions of European fascists during the 1930s. Hitler paid close attention to the debates in Congress, incorporating observations on Congressional debates into his speeches. Mussolini was also a regular reader of American newspapers in addition to being a syndicated columnist for the Hearst papers. The actions and speeches of Martin Dies Jr. were of considerable interest to the Nazi press. The South's distinctive socio-economic structures and related discourse offered encouragement to the like-minded — in this case European fascists. The result, intentional or not, was that the South's social structures and favourable political discourse on fascism encouraged European fascists.

The shame and destruction of European fascism had a tremendous impact on the U.S. South. Like an evil twin, European fascism proved to be the South's worst enemy in

the post war period. The racist doctrines of the fascist states inevitably led to the conclusion among many Americans that racial and religious prejudice in the United States was un-American. As a result, the similarities between the South to European fascism discredited many of the South's social structures, especially those dealing with race. Many southerners suffered cognitive dissonance between their self-identification as being the 'most American' citizens and their desire to cling to the South's traditional social structures that were increasingly labelled as fascist. Just as hard-core antebellum secessionists ended up being America's most effective abolitionists, the South's connections with fascism kneecapped its ability to resist change during the Civil Rights movement.

This dissertation's methodological interventions, beyond shedding new light on the connections between the U.S. South and European fascism, offers broader lessons regarding causality and history, historical agency, and political discourse and practice. Regarding causality, this thesis identified common root cause factors that fed into shared practices. For instance, there was common causality between Germany and the South regarding land and labour policies. Germany, Italy, and the South were all linked by how each society processed the humiliations associated with thwarted nationalist projects. The strong correlation between the social structures of the South and fascist Europe manifests as a causal factor for the South's political response when considered against the patterns of southern rhetoric. The wider take-away is that a meticulous and data-driven approaches allow a researcher to identify previously hidden patterns as nodes to establish credible arguments as to historical causality.

There is also a lesson presented in the consideration of the role of historical agency in explaining broader societal phenomena. Agency is a characteristic of those who do something in the belief that their actions will solve some problem. There is no question that southern meso-elites had agency, but to what degree did their distinct behaviour regarding European fascism represent their autonomous will versus being a reflection of their region's social structures and constraints? Southern politicians' rhetoric and actions as a whole were supportive of European fascism as they utilized the discourse of fascism in what they viewed as a knife fight against an intrusive federally propagated

progressivism. The shared practices between the South and fascist Europe provided the societal context for individual southerners to inadvertently encourage European fascists while battling for the traditions of their own region. The study of southern congressmen provides a case study in the dichotomy between agency and structure, specifically how historical agents can both reflect and shape their society.

This thesis also demonstrates the value of leveraging the availability of big data in conjunction with hermeneutics in the analysis of political discourse. The digitization of large data-intensive primary sources offers the opportunity to combine deep historical understanding with statistical analysis to gain better insights into both the trend and the interpretation of discourse. Big data circumvents the need to depend on only anecdotal data points because it, combined with data mining and statistical methods, expands the sample set to the entire population. While other researchers have used text mining in combination with the Congressional Record to research political discourse, these efforts spartanly focused on key word frequency. This type of analysis is limited because it cannot fully ‘understand’ the content of the speech or define its political meaning. The research in this thesis is unique in that it incorporates the completeness of text mining a full dataset in conjunction with a context-driven hermeneutical approach.<sup>15</sup> Observed anecdotally on a case-by-case basis, the speech of individual southerners regarding fascism during the interwar years appears to be unremarkable. However, subjecting the entirety of southern Congressional discourse from the interwar period to a hermeneutical and quantitative analysis provided insights regarding how southerners discussed fascism and how their positions shaped policy in the United States.

The exploration and analysis of the South’s connections with fascist Europe during the interwar period has lessons for contemporary society. Today, western democracies are engaged in what Yascha Mounk calls the “Great Experiment” — the ability to transform from ethnic-centric nations to diverse states. Mounk argued that this

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<sup>15</sup> Ethan C. Tucker, Colton J. Capps, and Lior Shamir, “A data science approach to 138 years of congressional speeches,” *Heliyon* Volume 6, Issue 8, August 2020; Zhengyu Ma, Tianjiao Qi, James Route, and Amir Ziai, “Mining Data from the Congressional Record,” Cornell University, *Computers and Society arXiv*, June 3, 2019; Peter Jenkins, “Text Mining the U.S. Congressional Record,” in *War and Happiness, The Role of Temperament in the Assessment of Resolve* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 55-73.

will be a painful transformation as evidenced by the 2020 and 2023 violent racial protests in the United States and France respectively. The “Great Experiment” along with other factors such as wealth disparities and an out-of-touch elite will continue to feed populist discontent in the West.<sup>16</sup> Southern partisan, John C. Calhoun, lamented on his deathbed before the Civil War, “The South! The South! God knows what will become of her!”<sup>17</sup> As the political polarization of the 1930s has returned with a vengeance in the twenty-first century, southern ideas and symbols, considered at one time to be akin to those of fascist Europe, continue to influence the world as part of a network of right-wing populism. This thesis serves as a testament for white southerners to remember from whence they came and to recognize the foundation for the deep conservatism that still dominates their region today.

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<sup>16</sup> Yascha Mounk, *The Great Experiment: Why Diverse Democracies Fall Apart and How They Can Endure* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2022), 5-49.

<sup>17</sup> John Shelton Reed, *My Tears Spoiled My Aim: and Other Reflections on Southern Culture* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993), 44.

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# Appendix

## Appendix A: Source Data

### Southern Responses in Congressional Record

Cngrs	Vol	Part	Year	Month	Day	Chamber	Member	State	Party	Keyword	Type	Page
71	71	1	1929	Apr	23	S	Heflin	AL	D	Mussolini	O	359
71	71	1	1929	Apr	29	S	Heflin	AL	D	Mussolini	N	640
71	71	1	1929	May	2	S	Heflin	AL	D	Mussolini	N	771
71	71	2	1929	May	15	S	Black	AL	D	Mussolini	O	1331
71	71	2	1929	May	21	S	Heflin	AL	D	Mussolini	N	1721
71	71	2	1929	May	23	S	Heflin	AL	D	Mussolini	N	1801
71	71	2	1929	May	24	S	Blease	SC	D	Mussolini	O	1854
71	71	2	1929	May	28	S	Heflin	AL	D	Mussolini	O	2055
71	71	2	1929	June	3	S	Blease	SC	D	Mussolini	O	2236
71	71	3	1929	June	7	S	Heflin	AL	D	Mussolini	O	2503
71	71	3	1929	June	14	H	Hastings	OK	D	Mussolini	O	2921
71	71	4	1929	Oct	11	S	Heflin	AL	D	Mussolini	O	4465
71	72	3	1930	Feb	4	S	Heflin	AL	D	Mussolini	N	2996
71	72	3	1930	Feb	7	S	Heflin	AL	D	Mussolini	N	3238
71	72	7	1930	Apr	22	S	Heflin	AL	D	Mussolini	O	7398
71	72	9	1930	Jun	4	S	Heflin	AL	D	Mussolini	N	10013
71	72	10	1930	Jun	4	H	Fulmer	SC	D	Mussolini	O	10517
71	72	11	1930	Jul	3	S	Barkley	KY	D	Mussolini	O	12412
71	72	11	1930	Jul	3	H	Garner	TX	D	Mussolini	O	12681
71	74	3	1931	Jan	17	H	Blanton	TX	D	Mussolini	O	2503
71	74	4	1931	Jan	30	S	Heflin	AL	D	Mussolini	N	3574
71	74	4	1931	Feb	2	S	Heflin	AL	D	Mussolini	N	3754
71	74	4	1931	Feb	4	S	Heflin	AL	D	Mussolini	N	3920
71	74	4	1931	Feb	9	S	Heflin	AL	D	Mussolini	N	4924
71	74	6	1931	Feb	27	S	Heflin	AL	D	Mussolini	N	6235
72	75	1	1931	Dec	14	H	Collins	MS	D	Hitler	O	473
72	75	1	1931	Dec	14	H	Dies	TX	D	Hitler	O	847
72	75	1	1931	Dec	14	H	Fiannagan	VA	D	Hitler	O	878
72	75	1	1931	Dec	15	S	McKellar	TN	D	Mussolini	O	530
72	75	1	1931	Dec	15	S	McKellar	TN	D	Mussolini	O	1006
72	75	1	1931	Dec	15	S	McKellar	TN	D	Mussolini	O	1090
72	75	7	1932	Mar	31	S	Thomas	OK	D	Mussolini	O	7197
72	75	9	1932	May	31	H	Fuller	AR	D	Mussolini	O	9785
72	75	11	1932	May	31	H	Blanton	TX	D	Mussolini	O	12031
72	75	11	1932	May	31	S	Logan	KY	D	Mussolini	O	12523
72	75	11	1932	Jun	10	H	McSwain	SC	D	Mussolini	O	12638
72	75	13	1932	Jun	10	S	Thomas	OK	D	Mussolini	D	14107
73	77	1	1933	Mar	15	H	Cross	TX	D	Hitler	O	478
73	77	1	1933	Mar	15	H	McFarlane	TX	D	Hitler	O	492
73	77	1	1933	Mar	22	H	Blanton	TX	D	Hitler	D	726
73	77	1	1933	Mar	27	H	Green	FL	D	Hitler	O	879
73	77	1	1933	Mar	27	H	Blanton	TX	D	Hitler	D	885
73	77	1	1933	Mar	27	H	Dies	TX	D	Hitler	D	886
73	77	1	1933	Mar	27	H	May	KY	D	Hitler	D	887
73	77	1	1933	Mar	27	H	Patman	TX	D	Hitler	D	887
73	77	1	1933	Mar	16	H	Taylor	TN	R	Mussolini	O	564
73	77	5	1933	May	26	H	Terrell	TX	D	Hitler	O	4375
73	77	6	1933	Jun	10	S	Robinson	AR	D	Hitler	N	5538
73	77	6	1933	Jun	15	H	McClintic	OK	D	Hitler	O	6234
73	78	4	1934	Mar	10	H	Terrell	TX	D	Mussolini	O	4209
73	78	5	1934	Mar	20	H	Taylor	TN	R	Hitler	N	4937
73	78	8	1934	May	11	S	Gore	OK	D	Hitler	O	8577
73	78	10	1934	Jun	4	H	Collins	MS	D	Hitler	N	10454

74	79	1	1935	Jan	17	S	Long	LA	D	Hitler	O	578
74	79	1	1935	Jan	23	H	Robson	KY	R	Hitler	O	846
74	79	1	1935	Jan	23	H	Blanton	TX	D	Hitler	O	858
74	79	1	1935	Jan	22	S	Reynolds	NC	D	Mussolini	O	774
74	79	1	1935	Jan	28	S	Russell	GA	D	Mussolini	O	1053
74	79	2	1935	Feb	1	H	Sanders	LA	D	Hitler	N	1368
74	79	2	1935	Feb	8	H	Blanton	TX	D	Hitler	N	1757
74	79	3	1935	Mar	6	H	Maverick	TX	D	Hitler	O	3041
74	79	4	1935	Mar	22	S	Thomas	OK	D	Fascism	N	4298
74	79	5	1935	Apr	5	S	Long	LA	D	Hitler	O	5112
74	79	8	1935	Jun	12	S	Long	LA	D	Hitler	O	9154
74	79	8	1935	Jun	13	H	Lee	OK	D	Hitler	O	9240
74	79	8	1935	Jun	12	S	Long	LA	D	Fascism	O	9100
74	79	10	1935	Jun	29	H	Huddleston	AL	D	Hitler	O	10419
74	79	10	1935	Jul	1	H	Robson	KY	R	Hitler	O	10529
74	79	10	1935	Jul	8	S	Reynolds	NC	D	Mussolini	O	10747
74	79	10	1935	Jul	8	H	May	KY	D	Mussolini	O	10784
74	79	10	1935	Jul	17	H	Maverick	TX	D	Fascism	O	11318
74	79	10	1935	Jul	18	S	Bailey	NC	D	Fascism	N	11386
74	79	11	1935	Jul	22	H	Blanton	TX	D	Hitler	D	11572
74	79	11	1935	Jul	25	H	Blanton	TX	D	Hitler	D	11863
74	79	12	1935	Aug	8	H	Blanton	TX	D	Hitler	D	12738
74	80	1	1936	Jan	27	H	Lee	OK	D	Hitler	O	1055
74	80	3	1936	Mar	3	H	Blanton	TX	D	Hitler	D	3183
74	80	3	1936	Mar	4	H	Maverick	TX	D	Hitler	O	3278
74	80	3	1936	Feb	24	H	McSwain	SC	D	Fascism	N	2719
74	80	3	1936	Mar	4	H	Maverick	TX	D	Fascism	O	3277
74	80	4	1936	Mar	27	H	Maverick	TX	D	Hitler	O	4532
74	80	4	1936	Mar	19	H	Colmer	MS	D	Mussolini	N	4054
74	80	4	1936	Mar	11	H	Maverick	TX	D	Fascism	O	3573
74	80	5	1936	Apr	15	H	Maverick	TX	D	Hitler	O	5520
74	80	6	1936	Apr	22	S	Reynolds	NC	D	Hitler	O	5837
74	80	6	1936	Apr	28	H	Maverick	TX	D	Fascist	O	6294
74	80	7	1936	May	22	H	Maverick	TX	D	Fascism	O	7814
74	80	8	1936	Jun	3	H	Disney	OK	D	Fascism	O	8900
75	81	1	1937	Jan	6	H	Maverick	TX	D	Hitler	O	87
75	81	1	1937	Feb	8	H	Gasque	SC	D	Fascism	O	988
75	81	1	1937	Feb	8	H	Maverick	TX	D	Fascism	O	1000
75	81	1	1937	Feb	8	H	Green	FL	D	Fascism	N	1000
75	81	1	1937	Feb	12	H	Robson	KY	R	Fascism	N	1185
75	81	2	1937	Mar	2	S	Logan	KY	D	Hitler	O	1725
75	81	2	1937	Mar	16	H	Robson	KY	R	Hitler	O	2277
75	81	2	1937	Mar	17	H	Maverick	TX	D	Hitler	O	2367
75	81	2	1937	Mar	4	H	Flannagan	VA	D	Fascism	O	1881
75	81	2	1937	Mar	8	H	Cooley	SC	D	Fascism	O	1978
75	81	2	1937	Feb	25	H	Wilcox	FL	D	Fascist	O	1615
75	81	3	1937	Mar	23	H	Dies	TX	D	Hitler	O	2638
75	81	3	1937	Apr	8	H	Taylor	TN	R	Hitler	O	3283
75	81	3	1937	Apr	8	H	Warren	NC	D	Hitler	O	3286-3290
75	81	3	1937	Apr	8	H	Maverick	TX	D	Hitler	O	3286-3290
75	81	4	1937	Apr	21	H	Dies	TX	D	Hitler	O	3692
75	81	4	1937	May	17	H	Robson	KY	R	Hitler	O	4697
75	81	5	1937	Jun	10	H	Robertson	VA	D	Hitler	O	5558
75	81	5	1937	Jun	14	H	Dies	TX	D	Mussolini	N	5681
75	81	5	1937	Jun	8	H	Dies	TX	D	Fascism	O	5445
75	81	5	1937	Jun	14	H	Dies	TX	D	Fascism	O	5679
75	81	6	1937	Jun	30	H	Cox	GA	D	Hitler	O	6637
75	81	6	1937	Jul	13	S	Bailey	NC	D	Hitler	D	7097
75	82	1	1937	Nov	30	H	Flannagan	VA	D	Hitler	O	549
75	82	1	1937	Nov	19	H	Dies	TX	D	Fascism	O	197
75	82	1	1937	Nov	17	H	McReynolds	TN	D	Fascist	N	94
75	82	1	1937	Dec	3	S	Barkley	KY	D	Fascist	O	812
75	82	2	1937	Dec	13	S	Reynolds	NC	D	Hitler	O	1357
75	82	2	1937	Dec	13	S	Reynolds	NC	D	Mussolini	O	1357
75	82	2	1937	Dec	17	S	Bilbo	MS	D	Mussolini	D	1725
75	82	2	1937	Dec	16	S	Russell	GA	D	Fascism	O	1608
75	82	2	1937	Dec	16	S	Bailey	SC	D	Fascism	O	1610
75	82	2	1937	Dec	16	S	Lee	OK	D	Fascism	O	1611
75	82	2	1937	Dec	16	H	Pace	GA	D	Fascism	N	1667
75	82	2	1937	Dec	16	H	Taylor	TN	R	Fascism	O	1676
75	82	2	1937	Dec	21	H	Maverick	TX	D	Fascist	O	2036

75	83	1	1938	Jan	6	S	Reynolds	NC	D	Hitler	O	87
75	83	1	1938	Jan	20	H	Woodrum	VA	D	Hitler	D	838
75	83	1	1938	Jan	26	S	Russell	GA	D	Hitler	O	1106, 1109
75	83	1	1938	Jan	6	S	Reynolds	NC	D	Mussolini	D	91
75	83	1	1938	Jan	8	S	Reynolds	NC	D	Fascism	D	221
75	83	1	1938	Jan	12	S	Reynolds	NC	D	Fascism	N	375
75	83	1	1938	Jan	8	S	Reynolds	NC	D	Fascist	O	218
75	83	1	1938	Jan	13	S	Caraway	AR	D	Fascist	O	432
75	83	1	1938	Jan	13	H	Cox	GA	D	Fascist	N	466
75	83	1	1938	Jan	21	H	Maverick	TX	D	Fascist	O	902
75	83	2	1938	Feb	18	H	Maverick	TX	D	Hitler	N	2184
75	83	2	1938	Jan	28	H	Maverick	TX	D	Fascism	O	1244
75	83	3	1938	Feb	24	H	Maverick	TX	D	Hitler	D	2393
75	83	3	1938	Mar	14	H	Maverick	TX	D	Hitler	D	3331
75	83	3	1938	Mar	14	H	Dies	TX	D	Hitler	O	3336
75	83	3	1938	Mar	16	H	Robson	KY	R	Hitler	D	3502
75	83	3	1938	Mar	16	H	Massingale	OK	D	Hitler	N	3506
75	83	3	1938	Mar	16	H	Ferguson	OK	D	Hitler	O	3519
75	83	3	1938	Mar	16	H	Disney	OK	D	Hitler	N	3529
75	83	3	1938	Mar	15	H	Barkley	KY	D	Fascism	O	3363
75	83	4	1938	Mar	17	H	Rayburn	TX	D	Hitler	O	3592
75	83	4	1938	Mar	17	H	Maverick	TX	D	Hitler	O	3599
75	83	4	1938	Mar	18	H	Creal	KY	D	Hitler	O	3671
75	83	4	1938	Mar	28	S	Barkley	KY	D	Hitler	O	4199
75	83	4	1938	Mar	30	H	Maverick	TX	D	Hitler	N	4393
75	83	4	1938	Mar	24	H	Hendricks	FL	D	Fascism	O	4056
75	83	4	1938	Mar	24	H	Smith	OK	D	Fascist	O	4056
75	83	5	1938	Apr	6	H	Patman	TX	D	Hitler	O	4897
75	83	6	1938	May	4	S	Bailey	NC	D	Fascism	O	6225
75	83	7	1938	May	24	S	Bilbo	MS	D	Hitler	D	7359 - 7362
75	83	7	1938	May	26	H	Dies	TX	D	Hitler	O	7568-7586
75	83	7	1938	May	26	H	Maverick	TX	D	Hitler	D	7568-7586
75	83	8	1938	Jun	15	S	Overton	LA	D	Hitler	O	9385
76	84	1	1939	Jan	16	S	Reynolds	NC	D	Hitler	D	367
76	84	1	1939	Jan	16	S	Reynolds	NC	D	Hitler	D	377
76	84	1	1939	Jan	25	S	Reynolds	NC	D	Hitler	D	377, 746, 756
76	84	1	1939	Jan	25	S	Reynolds	NC	D	Hitler	O	747
76	84	1	1939	Jan	25	S	Reynolds	NC	D	Hitler	O	750
76	84	1	1939	Feb	1	S	Reynolds	NC	D	Hitler	O	1024
76	84	1	1939	Feb	3	H	Dies	TX	D	Hitler	O	1127
76	84	1	1939	Feb	1	S	Reynolds	NC	D	Nazi	D	1023
76	84	2	1939	Feb	14	H	Boren	OK	D	Hitler	O	1398
76	84	2	1939	Feb	15	H	Pace	GA	D	Hitler	O	1415
76	84	2	1939	Feb	21	S	Reynolds	NC	D	Hitler	D	1678
76	84	2	1939	Feb	21	S	Reynolds	NC	D	Hitler	D	1680
76	84	2	1939	Feb	23	S	Reynolds	NC	D	Hitler	D	1828
76	84	2	1939	Feb	27	S	Reynolds	NC	D	Hitler	D	1933
76	84	2	1939	Feb	28	S	Lee	OK	D	Hitler	O	1987
76	84	2	1939	Feb	28	S	Logan	KY	D	Hitler	O	2002
76	84	2	1939	Mar	2	S	Logan	KY	D	Hitler	O	2124
76	84	2	1939	Mar	3	S	Barkley	KY	D	Hitler	O	2211
76	84	2	1939	Mar	3	S	Lee	OK	D	Mussolini	N	2220
76	84	2	1939	Feb	14	H	Boren	OK	D	Mussolini	O	1397
76	84	2	1939	Feb	9	H	Rankin	MS	D	Fascist	O	1298
76	84	3	1939	Mar	7	S	Barkley	KY	D	Hitler	O	2354
76	84	3	1939	Mar	14	S	Reynolds	NC	D	Hitler	O	2717
76	84	3	1939	Mar	25	H	Vincent	KY	D	Hitler	O	3311
76	84	4	1939	Mar	31	S	Reynolds	NC	D	Hitler	O	3614
76	84	4	1939	Apr	3	H	Rankin	MS	D	Hitler	D	3721
76	84	4	1939	Apr	4	S	Reynolds	NC	D	Hitler	O	3887
76	84	4	1939	Apr	11	S	Bilbo	MS	D	Hitler	O	4104
76	84	4	1939	Apr	13	S	Reynolds	NC	D	Hitler	O	4219
76	84	4	1939	Apr	13	S	Reynolds	NC	D	Hitler	D	4228
76	84	4	1939	Apr	20	H	Robson	KY	R	Hitler	O	4574
76	84	4	1939	Apr	13	S	Reynolds	NC	D	Mussolini	D	4229
76	84	4	1939	Apr	11	H	Rankin	MS	D	Fascism	D	4116
76	84	4	1939	Apr	13	S	Reynolds	NC	D	Fascist	O	4225
76	84	5	1939	Apr	24	S	Bilbo	MS	D	Hitler	O	4653 - 4676
76	84	5	1939	May	4	H	Massingale	OK	D	Hitler	N	5142
76	84	5	1939	May	5	H	Massingale	OK	D	Hitler	O	5161
76	84	5	1939	May	5	H	Hobbs	AL	D	Hitler	O	5178
76	84	5	1939	May	11	S	Reynolds	NC	D	Hitler	O	5412 - 5434
76	84	5	1939	May	18	H	Cox	GA	D	Hitler	O	5749
76	84	5	1939	May	11	S	Reynolds	NC	D	Fascist	D	5412
76	84	7	1939	Jun	27	H	Bullwinkle	NC	D	Fascist	O	8013
76	84	7	1939	Jun	21	H	Terry	AR	D	Nazi	O	7659
76	84	8	1939	Jun	28	S	Pepper	FL	D	Fascist	O	8073
76	84	9	1939	Jul	20	H	Creal	KY	D	Hitler	O	9599
76	84	9	1939	Jul	25	H	Kitchens	AR	D	Mussolini	O	9980