
The term fascism originally referred to the extreme right-wing ideological and political movement in Italy in the early 1920s under the leadership of Benito Mussolini. As an ideology and a system of governance, Italian fascism was characterized by populism, belligerent nationalism, the notion of racial rebirth, and the exaltation of the nation over individuals or groups. Hostile to democracy, socialism, and liberalism, Mussolini's government relied on a centralized, autocratic system of rule, severe economic and social regimentation, and a commitment to violently purging groups or movements opposed to the State. In the public's imagination, Italian fascism has come to be symbolized by its devotion to youth and masculinity, mass rallies, theatrical displays of military power, and the use of terror to subdue political opposition. Since then, fascism has been a dynamic, evolving political ideology that has taken on many forms in a variety of diverse nations. As a result, experts have had difficulty identifying common traits relative to a generic form of fascism and have defined it in a variety of conflicting ways. Until recently, this lack of a cohesive framework for studying fascism has made the production of an encyclopedia, whose entries must share a common perspective on a central topic, extremely difficult.

Roger Griffin, professor of modern history at Oxford-Brooks University and noted fascist-studies expert, begins World Fascism: A Historical Encyclopedia by outlining the developments in the field of fascist studies and describing the growing consensus of scholarly opinion for a conceptual framework and an agreed upon definition of generic fascism. Recent scholarship, Griffin maintains, has drifted toward a new approach to the subject, increasingly viewing fascism as a worldwide revolutionary ideology with a distinctive form of politics and common features. For the purposes of the encyclopedia, Griffin provides a working definition of fascism, consisting of three core elements: ultranationalism, revolution, and rebirth. Although this definition is controversial, it has permitted Cyprian P. Blamires (with Paul Jackson) to produce a distinctive and well-timed reference treatment of the subject.

Organized alphabetically in two volumes, World Fascism: A Historical Encyclopedia covers the period from World War II until today and features five hundred A–Z entries. Signed articles are written by an impressive list of more than one hundred subject specialists and are devoted to a wide variety of topics, including key people, significant events, important movements, relevant doctrines, and a host of other related subjects. Comprehensive coverage is given to those governments openly identifying themselves as fascist, those that have been identified as fascist in the public's mind, and those that share an affinity with fascist ideology. The generally interesting and well-written entries are scholarly in their approach and provide references and cross references. Key features of the set include lists of contributors and entries, a chronology, a general bibliography, an index subdivided by subject with cross references highlighted in bold text, and a generous supply of high-quality photographs and illustrations.

There are many other reference works devoted to Nazi Germany and Italian fascism. For all of the aforementioned reasons, however, Blamire and Jackson's effort is the first significant attempt to produce an encyclopedia giving in-depth historical and global coverage to fascism from its beginnings until the new millennium, and as such, it is without rival in its format. Nonetheless, there are several books that will serve as excellent companion volumes. Foremost among these are the works of Roger Griffin. His first important monograph, The Nature of Fascism (Routledge, 1991), is notable for establishing a new theory of generic fascism, and it has had enormous influence among fascist-studies scholars since its publication. More recently, his book with Matthew Feldman, Fascism (Routledge, 2003), provides an interesting examination of the nature of fascism, its social dynamics, its relationship with culture, and its postwar development. Two other important contributions to the literature include Zeev Sternhell, Mario Sznajder, and Maia Ashéris's The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution (Princeton Univ. Pr., 1996) and Robert O. Paxson's The Anatomy of Fascism (Vintage Bks., 2004). Both works will provide the interested reader with an engaging examination of fascism's development since its inception.

World Fascism: A Historical Encyclopedia is a unique addition that fills a glaring void in the reference literature for serious students of the postwar period. With the increasing global influence of autocratic, militaristic, collectivist, and nationalist governments, World Fascism will serve as a timely research tool for those readers interested in politics, modern history, racism, nationalism, and related subjects. Packaged in durable bindings using high-quality materials and unrivaled in its depth and scope, World Fascism is highly recommended for all academic and public library collections serving political science and history students and researchers.—Vincent P. Tinerella, Coordinator of Electronic Reference Services, Founders Memorial Library, Northern Illinois University, Dekalb