

## 30 American Religious Fascism

Huey Long, the politician from Louisiana, was powerful in the 1930s as fascism was rising in Europe. Americans then feared America might “go fascist”. Long rightly said: if fascism ever came to America, it would not come as an explicit doctrine and will not be called fascism. Rather, fascism would come as Mom, Apple Pie, Baseball, The Flag, Our Troops, Americanism, and a fight against enemies of America. Fascism was a tendency in many societies but did not take the same form everywhere. Fascism would come to America in a crusade to preserve what is “American” against enemies. It would come much as Right Wingers now promote Americanism to sustain a class system in which they are secure, and use Islam and poor people as enemies; or Left Wingers deny the European Christian roots of America so as to make an American identity to serve Political Correctness and its beneficiaries. Only some people get to decide what is American, what gets preserved, what gets discarded, and who the enemies are. The fact that fascism comes this way is a message of novels and movies “The Watchmen” and “V for Vendetta”. To stop fascism in America, we have to head off false Americanism while preserving good universal American values and while extending them to everybody who can live by them. A good movie about Long, based on a good book, is “All the King’s Men”.

“Fascism” with a big “F” refers to the governments in Germany, Italy, Spain, and Japan around World War Two while “fascism” with a small “f” is the general term for that kind of society. The term “fascism” means “state system based on the idea of a bundle of sticks” in that one stick breaks easily while a bundle is strong, much stronger than the sum strengths of the individual sticks; the state is a team; so we should all work together, and be bound together, for greater good. “Fascism” in Germany was “National Socialism”. All fascisms combine: people believe society is a system, people believe the system can work, people believe they depend on the system and on it working, people believe they have a place in the system, people believe that people come in different kinds such as occupations and-or socioeconomic classes, people believe the system is based on mutual cooperation, people believe their mutual dependence and cooperation makes them much stronger, moderate socialism (not communism), strong civil order, putting almost everyone in the system but not everyone, taking care of everyone who is in the system, making scapegoats of people who are not in the system, state support for business, business support for the state, cooperation between business firms, using business to lead the country, a sense of national and ethnic destiny, and having constant enemies so as to stimulate cohesion. America already has all this, as do China, Russia, India, likely Brazil, and some Muslim countries such as Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Indonesia. In social science, fascism is a kind of socialism but it is better to think of socialism as a kind of fascism. Russian and Chinese socialism were more like fascism than like idealized British or German socialism from 1910. Chinese socialism now is more like German or Japanese fascism than like idealized communism. Fascism is not like the socialism that Right Wingers dread in theory but is more like the strong state that they work for in fact. The intent of Left Wingers is not authoritarian society but the end result of their programs resembles fascism.

I am not worried that: Americans will adopt Hinduism en masse, worship blue skinned Krishna, and worship cows; Americans will adopt Islam en masse and follow Muslim law; or Americans will become

pacifist vegetarian Buddhists. If individual Americans do wish to do any of that, their decision is fine, as long as they do it out of enlightened free choice.

I am worried that America will move to modest fascism similar to what China or Russia have now, call it Americanism, and find a religious rationale. This fascism does not have to be heavy-handed as German Fascism was up to World War Two; it can be fairly light-handed as long as it is pervasive. To do so, Americans will have to give up the teachings of Jesus and Western values; but that does not seem to be a big obstacle.

### **Driving Issues.**

Recall from the chapters on issues some realities for the near future. Americans do not accept these realities well but instead try to ignore them or run around them. How these realities play out, and how Americans deal with them, or don't deal with them, will affect the future of America.

-The world is already over populated and will continue to over populate.

-Most of the people in the world cannot live like idealized American suburbanites even if the world economy was more productive and the wealth was evenly distributed.

-America gets more world resources, and lives "higher on the hog", than its productivity in relation to other nations warrants. While the overall standard of living in America need not fall, especially if the country is well run, Americans cannot continue to live much better than everybody else.

-If America is not well run, the average standard of living in America will fall.

-Capitalism is an effective and good way to run an economy but it needs to be regulated wisely.

-Capitalism inevitably has about 6% to 12% real structural unemployment so that even people who really want to work, and have trained somewhat to work, cannot get jobs.

-Capitalism inevitably has at least 10% under employment in that people who are will to work hard have jobs but the jobs do not pay enough, and offer enough benefits, to raise a family on well.

-Some people are not smart enough, and have not trained enough, to get good jobs even if there was no problem with unemployment or under employment.

-As more wealth is created, it does not increase the standard of living generally. Rather, the power to control the wealth concentrates into a few hundred families around the world.

-World climate is changing. The changes will hurt more than help.

-The world ecosystem is deteriorating.

-Class society is real. How bad or good it is depends on the situation.

-The people who have good jobs want to keep them and want their children to have them. The secure people are willing to oppress the poor in order to keep secure. They use the state to control the poor.

-People do not like to see the poor suffer in public. People will provide programs to alleviate public suffering. The programs never cure poverty.

-Socio-economic problems interact with ethnicity and religion.

-People, and business firms, quickly become dependent on the state.

-People, and business firms, seek to have the state take care of them.

### **Scenarios.**

Below I list some options for the future of America. All but option one are kinds of fascism. Which of the scenarios below seems most likely in America? Feel free to make up your own scenarios.

1. Americans rediscover the teachings of Jesus and Western values. They see that working hard to make the world better is hard work, but it is also fun, so they put in the hard work, and they get out some of the fun. They see that citizenship is important but also is hard work; and they put in the hard work. They are able to extend values to include non-Christian religions and people of all kinds. They can sort real problems from false problems. They are able to face real problems and can provide workable long-term solutions that everybody can understand and live with. Individual Americans can assess their own ability as citizens. When they are not up to the task of citizenship, they do not assert their selfish desires. Instead, they choose wise representatives who can run the country well. Americans rapidly adopt "green" technology.

2. Americans revert to strong fundamentalist religion, Christian in name but not in practice. In theory, Americans give up pre-marital sex, serial monogamy, birth control, and abortion. In practice, they use all of them, but illegally. The police select who they catch, and the court selects the punishments given. In theory, Americans use drugs much less except alcohol and tobacco. They find a way for some middle class women to stay home to take care of children, likely by making sure women always get paid less even when they do the same work as men. They use business firms as a tool to address all social and economic problems even when business is not the appropriate tool. If a problem cannot be addressed through business and private charity, Americans give up on it. Americans adopt the "gospel of wealth" meaning that rich people are favored by God, if God likes you then he makes you rich, poor people are punished by God, and everybody should be able to make it on his-her own. Americans accept a socio-economic hierarchy of rich, middle, and poor. Americans use laws against drugs and sex to attack the poor and keep them from threatening the security of the middle class. To make sure the poor do not starve in public, Americans continue some care programs.

Christians extend tolerance to non-Christian religions as long as non-Christian religions are not taught at school or featured in state ceremonies, and non-Christian religions share the same fundamentalist values about family and class. Most major non-Christian religions are able to comply. Groups that do not share

the security and general standard of living adopt some religious ideas that are non-standard, such as strong social justice. As long as those ideas cause few problems, the majority ignore them.

3. Americans adopt a public ideology of radical equality but make sure, in practice, that a socio-economic structure develops which preserves the middle class and upper class. Women have to work, and do so in large numbers. Birth control is widespread and abortion is available. Despite legalizing some drugs, the middle class prefers to focus on school, jobs, and hard work. Middle class families fight to keep funding for their schools high, and the performance of children in their schools high, so their children can get good jobs. Middle class families make sure the schools of poor children are technically passable but really inferior so poor children cannot compete for jobs. The middle class extends some support benefits to the poor so the poor do not suffer in public. Rather than understand problems deeply and take account of human nature in addressing problems, the typical response is to “throw money at it” as long as throwing money does not undermine the security of the middle class. Hard-hit groups do not try to understand and to address problems at a deep level but instead seek to be clients of the middle class through programs.

Religious affiliation does not matter if believers follow these values in practice. People take pride in their religious tolerance even while knowing little about their own religion or other religions. Most people adopt a generalized belief in spirituality and some god, and go to some religious institution. Some hard-hit groups develop alternative religious ideas that explain their situation, such as Exile in Babylon or the ultimate revenge of God. These ideas are tolerated as long as they do not upset the basic order or require the general public to examine religion.

4. Options 2 and 3 combine by not stressing Christianity but instead by overtly stressing the destiny of America and by covertly stressing class society. In the new view of God, God does not obsess about ethical monotheism and social justice, God is all about progress and development. This idea of progress need not mean anything moral. This is not the idea of progress from the Enlightenment. This progress will mean stronger, wealthier, knowing more science that can be used to create wealth and power, able to implement technology; and able to assert national destiny and domination. A variation on this attitude has been present in states for at least 3000 years, so this attitude is not unnatural. In this idea, God is not personal in the sense that I feel. God is a principle of cosmic regularity and cosmic expansion, and our society is the particular representative of this principle. This is the idea of progress that C.S. Lewis feared in his science fiction. Groups that push for this kind of progress often use half-moral arguments about general prosperity but really they foresee that they will benefit, both directly and by having a strong country, and they do not really care much about anybody else. Both right and left wing groups argue this way. In theory, everybody benefits, and everybody is better off than in the past even if we do not have justice, so we don't need to worry about justice, humanity, and the planet: “a rising tide floats all boats” and “everybody gets a piece of a constantly bigger pie”.

America is the chosen country of God to lead the world into the best future. To lead the world into the best future, America has to be strong. To be strong, America must have some strong socio-economic classes, some strong ethnic and religious groups, and many strong business firms of all sizes. Not all groups in America need be strong but some must. The strong groups must cooperate. Religious groups need not reach perfect accord but they must agree on a set of core principles that they can “really get behind”.

The new core principles will echo the historic principles from America's past from Northwestern European Christianity but the new values will not actually carry out the old values. The relation between the historic core principles and how they are carried out is like the relation between the Judeo-Christian idea of social justice and how it is (not) carried out. Americans will call for individual freedom but the actual freedom, and how different groups are differently free, will depend on relations to the rest of the world and relations among groups in the country. Individual freedom will have to balance against group solidarity, and will not often prevail. For middle class people, freedom and responsibility will mean theoretically being able to find any job you want on the open market except for some of the highest jobs, and being responsible for your family given what programs and subsidies are available to your group.

The state will work through business firms to make sure a minimum percent of parents have secure jobs that pay enough to get their children well educated enough to take similar jobs. Not everybody has to be taken care of and so not everybody will be taken care of. Unemployment and under employment will not go away. The actual levels of employment, wages, and benefits will depend on the world economy, America's relation to the world economy, and political-ethnic relations in America. Through business firms, the state will extend medical care to children. Through business firms, employed people will be able to get some health insurance. Many markets will become too big, or too important, to fail, and so the state will make sure firms don't fail and financial markets remain stable. The state will pick key players that it supports. Firms will jockey for state patronage. People will not feel entirely secure, and so will compete with each other as members of socio-economic classes and-or ethnic groups. The state will use their competition to bolster institutions. Some groups will bear the brunt of unemployment and under employment, and will cultivate the people and ideas that keep them in that role.

Business firms of all kinds, big and small, will become like secular churches. With their ability to create jobs and wealth, business firms will be like grades of angels in the Middle Ages, with the most powerful, such as investment banks and venture capital firms, being like archangels. Any old religion can easily participate in this new religion simply by being a part of America without causing much trouble. It is not necessary to be Christian, and, in fact, religious diversity helps people to think beyond old ideas to see God as the Spirit of the Future.

Any religion could be re-interpreted to support an America like this, and likely that will happen. Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism will be interpreted so as to support the new America. There will be too few Taoists or Zen followers to worry about.

Although any religion can participate, a generalized religion that stresses the Spirit and a vague God is most likely to come to the fore and become the core. People who "feel spiritual but not religious" will come to feel spiritual about the new Spirit of America and the future of America as leader of the world. God the Spirit will resemble the Dharma. God the Spirit will support social and economic relations, so social and economic relations will come to be like social Dharma. The teachings of Jesus, and Western values, will be made relative. When those values are useful, they will be invoked. When they are not useful, people will overlook them in favor of new values about success, destiny, security, and the power of our particular group. Any group that insists on its principles from its past, and so cannot support the new order, will be relegated to the economic bottom, and so reduced.

5. This version is like version four but played out on a global arena instead of nationally. This version is like the dystopia in the novel "Brave New World" by Aldus Huxley.

America will muddle along and slowly will become just another large modestly well-developed nation with all the troubles of other modestly well-developed nations, such as France and Brazil. America will have pockets of high development surrounded by pockets of decay. America will have more internal strife and disparities of wealth than most modestly developed nations, so it will be more like Brazil than France and more like the Philippines than Japan. America will have some strife between socio-economic classes and between races. As America becomes just another nation, rates of unemployment and under employment will stay at levels that we find now in England or France, that is, at least 10%. Working and middle class people will use ploys to make sure they keep their jobs, including making sure some ethnic and religious groups bear the brunt of the problems. The upper middle class and upper class of America will see they have more in common with those classes in other countries, such as Japan, Korea, Iran, Russia, China, and Germany. When they sense their international ties, they will lose touch with the working class, under employed, and unemployed in their own country. They will be less citizens of America than the world. As long as they benefit enough, they will take pride in feeling like citizens of the world even if the world is unfair and ecologically despoiled. They will accept whatever measures are needed to keep the world socio-economic order and their secure place in it. The end result will not be quite as in movies such as "District 9" and "Elysium" but that will be the underlying trend.

Once a country has a huge military apparatus, as America does in 2014, the country has a hard time dismantling that apparatus, but America will not be able to afford the present huge military apparatus. I don't know what might happen. The outcome depends in part on the rise of other nations such as China, Brazil, and India, and their military pushes. For example, America might have to cede control of the far Pacific Ocean to China. The global middle and upper classes might agree to a tacit division of the world into spheres of influence.

Old ideas of God, the Dharma, or Heaven will matter little. Religion will matter little, although particular groups within countries will cling to old religions and make a fuss from time to time. Anti-abortion religious activists in America might succeed in banning abortion in some states but middle class and upper class Americans won't mind as long as they can send daughters to get abortions in other states or in other countries. Nevertheless, people will pride themselves on a deft combination of religious fundamentalism and public religious tolerance.

People will feel that the world has a destiny, the world will share in cosmic order and development, and human society will be the local representative of cosmic order and development. The ruling class will feel as if they represent the God of destiny, cosmic order, and cosmic development. The ruling class will allow the rest of the world to have local beliefs because that will make control easier rather than harder. The end result will be hard only in a few places. In most places, control will be maintained through the media, drugs, and enlisting people in causes rather than through the police.

### **Real Needs.**

America has a real need for some of the same solutions that can lead to fascism if the solutions carry too far. Other countries share America's situation. America needs a sense of purpose. Americans need to

feel they are going somewhere when they go into the future. Americans need to feel they are part of a big country but a country that also cares about them despite its bigness. Americans need to feel they are various, but, even so, all the varieties can work together, fit together, and make something better than any variety alone. They need a better balance of cooperation and competition than they have had since the 1970s. They need a role for business firms without allowing business firms too much power. Think about how to find these things and fit them together without going too far into fascism.