

## **Let's call it Fascism**

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Let's call it fascism. I don't use the political "F" word in vain or as a smear. I use it analytically, as a description.

Fascism, politically, is the exploitation of fear. Fear of internal and external enemies to attain and maintain state power in the service of the interests of regime elites and their constituencies. Hitler did it. Saddam Hussein did it.

And the Bush gang does it. Scare people and then set yourself up as their only protector, and they'll let you take what you want, at their expense and against their own interests in anything but the illusion of security. It's a protection racket.

There was going to be change after 9/11, but it didn't have to take a fascist direction. That course was set shortly after the Twin Towers bombing when Karl Rove decided to theme the Bush presidency as a "War on Terror." What began as a public relations ploy - branding - opened the way for the "security" complex to make a massive power grab. We see the results now in the familiar waste product of fascism: torture chambers.

There have been periods of panic and fascist tendencies in the American past: Red Scares. This time it's different. Never before has an entire administration based itself on the mobilization of fear and declared an interminable war, draping a leaden security state over everyday life.

The "terrorist" is the all-purpose dehumanized demon for fascist regimes, the quintessence of the Other - the enemy whose single differentiating characteristic is the will to intimidate. By labelling any opponent a terrorist, permission is granted to act against adversaries with impunity. They do not have aims and aspirations of their own, but are exhausted by their hatred - they are made of hate. The only cure for terrorism, so the fascist reasons, is counter-terrorism, state terrorism; that is, "homeland security" and pre-emptive warfare.

Many other elements of fascism were dutifully recorded by political scientists and commentators in the period between the two world wars: an inherently contradictory alliance between sectors of industrial capitalism and embattled anti-modern segments of the domestic population, the substitution of fraudulent propaganda for public debate, ultra-nationalist ideology, dreams of empire and a "place in the sun," irrational adventurism, the use of force as a first resort, and the denial of political and economic realities. All of them are evident in the Bush regime's conduct. All we lack for full-blown

fascism is an explicitly anti-democratic party that openly strives to silence and eliminate opposition. But for how long?

To be precise, what we're living under now is proto- or crypto-fascism: an authoritarian-minded regime hiding behind democratic rhetoric and manipulating and abusing democratic institutions. It all goes back to fear. Fighting this regime means inspiring confidence in something better than the grim quest for security.