

The High Priest Of The Big Lie

Jan 10, 2021

This excellent essay by Professor Timothy Snyder tries to place Trump, Trumpism and the GOP into the proper context of fascism and other forms of authoritarianism.

I have never been convinced that Trump was a true fascist. (This offer does not apply to Stephen Miller, Sebastian Gorka or others around Trump.) He lacked any ideology beyond his personal vanity. He played many of the strings on the fascist violin. Trump's belief in racism and white nationalism, his open embrace of dictatorships and contempt for democracy, these are clearly fascist. But he failed to explicitly embrace militarism and imperialism, because the military were insufficiently sycophantic to his person. He only tepidly embraced using state power to reward the bulk of his followers. His engagement in Covid relief is a great example of him being too lazy and self-centered to be a proper fascist. If he had really pressed for more checks, if infrastructure week wasn't a running joke, maybe he starts to become a full-fledged fascist.

Trump is undoubtedly an authoritarian. Think about how that manifests though. HIS elections were fraudulent, including 2016, because it didn't reflect on his glory. The other GOP losses? He couldn't care less. Fascism is devoted to the party and Volk. Trump was only devoted to himself.

What Snyder also nails is the importance of the "Big Lie." Trump is the undisputed master of the "Little Lie." He could not speak more than five minutes without lying, from the moment he came down the escalator to five minutes ago, Trump lied about everything. As Snyder notes, many of Trump's lies were also "Medium Lies." Snyder:

Some of his lies were, admittedly, medium-size: that he was a successful businessman; that Russia did not support him in 2016; that Barack Obama was born in Kenya. Such medium-size lies were the standard fare of aspiring authoritarians in the 21st century. In Poland the right-wing party built a martyrdom cult around assigning blame to political rivals for an airplane crash that killed the nation's president. Hungary's Viktor Orban blames a vanishingly small number of Muslim refugees for his country's problems. But such claims were not quite big

lies; they stretched but did not rend what Hannah Arendt called “the fabric of factuality.”

What Trump did, though, was seed the ground for the Big Lie. That was the lie that America's democracy had failed because it did not give Trump a second term. That was the Big Lie that led to the Cracker Barrel Putsch on Wednesday. That Big Lie was created by Trump AND THE BROADER GOP'S assault on objective reality. Here is Snyder on the cultivation of the small lies:

Thanks to technological capacity and personal talent, Donald Trump lied at a pace perhaps unmatched by any other leader in history. For the most part these were small lies, and their main effect was cumulative. To believe in all of them was to accept the authority of a single man, because to believe in all of them was to disbelieve everything else. Once such personal authority was established, the president could treat everyone else as the liars; he even had the power to turn someone from a trusted adviser into a dishonest scoundrel with a single tweet. Yet so long as he was unable to enforce some truly big lie, some fantasy that created an alternative reality where people could live and die, his pre-fascism fell short of the thing itself.

By constantly lying and smearing the media, Trump made himself the only trusted source of information for millions of Americans. Social Media has amplified and accelerated this. Snyder mentions the death of local news...and, yeah, sure. But America has entered into Post-Truth Politics and the death of local news because there are now hundreds of other sources of "news." Trump exploited the existing landscape.

So, is Trump a fascist? A little bit, but not entirely. Does that in any way excuse his or his party's behavior? Absolutely not. You can be an authoritarian dictator without being fascist.

Now...Josh Hawley on the other hand...