

HOMEWORK: Respond to all questions in complete sentences on a separate sheet of paper.

Questions:

1. Find two words on this page you don't understand. Choose regular words, not names of people or groups. Look up the words in a dictionary or online at www.dictionary.com. Write down the definition of the word, and explain how it is used in this reading.
2. How did Fascists view democracy? Do you agree or disagree with their views? Explain.
3. Describe two similarities and two differences between fascism and communism.
4. Why do you think Fascist governments appealed to some people?
5. In the 1920s, supporters of fascism led Italy to change from democracy to dictatorship. As an American, would you ever be willing to give up your democratic rights (ex. the right to vote) and support a change to fascism? What events/conditions might lead you to do this? Explain your position in a paragraph at least 5 sentences long.

What is Fascism?

Historians still debate the real nature of fascist ideology. Mussolini coined the term, but fascists had no single unifying set of beliefs, as Marxists did. Today, we generally use the term to describe any authoritarian government that is not communist. In the 1920s and 1930s, though, fascism meant different things in different countries.

All forms of fascism, however, shared some basic features. It was rooted in extreme nationalism. Fascists glorified actions, violence, discipline, and, above all, blind loyalty to the state. Fascists were antidemocratic. They rejected the Enlightenment emphasis on reason and the concepts of equality and liberty spread by the French Revolution. To them, democracy led to greed, corruption, and weakness.

They claimed it put individual or class interests above national goals and destroyed feelings of community. Instead, fascists emphasized the need for the citizen to serve the state.

Fascists also pursued aggressive foreign expansion. Their ideas were linked to Social Darwinism, with its notion of "survival of the fittest." Fascist leaders glorified warfare as a necessary and noble struggle for survival. "War alone", said Mussolini, "brings up to its highest tension all human energy and puts the stamp of nobility upon peoples who have the courage to face it."

Compared to Communism

Fascists were the sworn enemy of socialists and communists. While communists called for world revolution of the proletariat, fascists pursued nationalist goals. Fascists found allies among business leaders and wealthy landowners, as well as the lower middle class. Communists won support among the urban working class.

Despite these basic differences, there are significant similarities between these two ideologies. Both flourished during economic hard times by promoting extreme programs of social change. In both communist Russia and fascist Italy, dictators imposed totalitarian governments in order to bring about their social revolutions. In both, the party elite claimed to rule in the name of the national interest.



Totalitarian Rule

Mussolini built the first totalitarian state, which served as a model for others. Fascist rule in Italy was never as absolute as Stalin's in the Soviet Union or the government Adolf Hitler would impose on Germany. All three governments, however, had some basic features in common: single party dictatorship; state control of the economy; police spies and state terrorism; strict censorship and government control of media; use of schools and media to indoctrinate citizens; and unquestioning obedience to a single ruler.

Appeal

Given its restrictions on individual freedom, why did fascism appeal to many Italians? First, it promised a strong, stable government and an end to the political feuding that had paralyzed democracy. Mussolini's intense nationalism also struck a chord among ordinary Italians. He revived national pride, pledging to make the Mediterranean Sea a "Roman lake" once more. Finally, Mussolini projected a sense of power and confidence at a time of disorder and despair. At first, Il Duce received good press outside Italy, too. Newspapers in Britain, France, and North America applauded Mussolini. "He made the trains run on time," they said, giving a nod to the discipline and order of the new government. Only later, when Mussolini embarked on a course of foreign conquest, did western democracies protest his actions.

