

Lesson Central Question: *What is Fascism and how might it have contributed to the outbreak of WWII?*

Objectives: *Students will be able to explain the political ideology of Fascism.*

*Students will be able to analyze how Fascism contributed to the outbreak of WWII.*

*Students will be able to source and contextualize primary source documents.*

Materials: *Document A (Textbook), Document B (Doctrine of Fascism by Mussolini), Document C (Mein Kampf by Hitler), accompanying worksheets, PowerPoint presentation on the origins of Fascism*

### Lesson Plan

0-5 minutes: check for understanding. What do students know or think they know about Fascism?

5-15 minutes: mini-lecture on Fascism, how it first rose to prominence in Italy and is an aggressive political ideology that many historians claim contributed to the outbreak of WWII. However, Fascism is often poorly understood by the average person and today we will be looking at it in more detail.

15-25 minutes: Hand out Textbook (Document A) and accompanying questions. Students complete, then debrief as a class. See how students define Fascism after reading the textbook, but point out that the textbook is quite vague. To better understand Fascism, we must look to the original sources.

25-50 minutes: Hand out Document B (Mussolini), Document C (Hitler), and accompanying worksheets. Students have rest of period to read, discuss and answer in pairs. Whole class debrief will be held the next day.

## Textbook (Document A)

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*The following is an excerpt from YOUR textbook explaining Fascism.*

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“Fascism was a new, militant political movement that emphasized loyalty to the state and obedience to its leader. Unlike communism, fascism had no clearly defined theory or program. Nevertheless, most Fascists shared several ideas. They preached an extreme form of nationalism, or loyalty to one’s country. Fascists believed that nations must struggle—peaceful states were doomed to be conquered. They pledged loyalty to an authoritarian leader (*dictator*) who guided and brought order to the state. In each nation, Fascists wore uniforms of a certain color, used special salutes, and held mass rallies.”

*Source: McDougal Littell, Modern World History: Patterns of Interaction. Published 2006.*

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## Benito Mussolini (Document B)

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*Benito Mussolini founded the first Fascist Party shortly after WWI in Italy. Promising a strong, new Italian state modeled after the ancient Roman Empire, Mussolini gained many followers among war veterans and the middle class. The following is an excerpt from the Doctrine of Fascism, which Mussolini wrote.*

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“Above all, Fascism believes neither in the possibility nor in the usefulness of peace. War alone brings out the best in people and puts the stamp (*mark*) of nobility upon the people who have the courage to face it.

Fascism attacks democratic ideals. Fascism denies that the majority can rule human societies. It insists that the inequality of men is beneficial (*helpful*). Some men are greater than others, and these men should rule.

The Fascist State organizes the nation. It takes away pointless or harmful freedoms, and preserves those that are essential. It cannot be the individual who decides what freedoms matter, but only the State.

In it the tradition of ancient Rome, the Fascist State seeks to create an empire. For Fascism, the creation of an empire is a demonstration of strength and health. Its opposite, which is staying at home, is a sign of weakness and corruption.

If every age has its own doctrine, it is clear from a thousand signs that the doctrine of the current age is Fascism. The Italian people will rise again after many centuries of abandonment and neglect (*rejection*). The Italian people will rise again to create a new Roman Empire, and once again the Italian people will lead the world.”

*Source: The Doctrine of Fascism by Benito Mussolini, written in 1932.*

## Adolf Hitler (Document C)

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*When Mussolini and his Fascist party rose to power in Italy, Adolf Hitler was a little-known political leader in Germany. Inspired in part by Mussolini, Hitler helped form the German Fascist movement in the mid-1920s. The following is an excerpt from Mein Kampf (My Struggle). In it, Hitler describes his own “Fascist worldview.”*

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“The political parties which currently exist cannot be expected to bring about the radical change that Germany needs. A political party will compromise with a political opponent. The Fascist worldview never does this. The Fascist worldview knows it is never wrong.

The Fascist worldview is intolerant, and this intolerance is virtuous (*good and right*). It will never share its place with the current order. It will wage a destructive battle to abolish (*destroy*) the current order.

It is not necessary for every individual fighter in this battle to understand the ideas and plans of the Fascist worldview. The Fascist worldview can exist only if leaders of great intellectual ability are served by a large mass of men who are passionately devoted to the cause. We must inspire discipline and blind faith, for the side with the best disciplined and most blindly obedient (*easy to control, do not question*) troops always triumphs.

In order to carry the ideas of the Fascist worldview to victory, a populist party had to be founded. The National Socialist German Labor Party (*Nazi Party*) is that party. The National Socialist German Labor Party will prepare the way for the destruction of the current order throughout the world.

The forces currently in control of the world are Jews here and Jews there and Jews everywhere. The hardship we are now experiencing is because of them. If this continues, the Jews will one day devour (*destroy*) the German nation and the world. We must wipe out the Jewish Empire which is now in control.”



Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Guiding Questions

### Benito Mussolini (Document B)

1. Contextualize: Before reading the document, what do you know about the state of affairs in Italy following the end of WWI? Were the Italians happy with their government and the Treaty of Versailles? Explain.
2. Source: Who is Benito Mussolini and what is his relationship to Fascism? Do you think he is a better source on the topic of Fascism than the textbook? Explain.
3. Interpret: After reading Mussolini's ideas, define Fascism in your own words. How is this definition similar and different to the one given by the textbook?
4. Close Reading: Why do you think Mussolini mentions the ancient Roman Empire in the last two paragraphs? How do you think Italians might react to these references?
5. Thinking Critically: Which of Mussolini's Fascist ideas do you find the most interesting and/or troubling? How do you think these views might have contributed to the outbreak of WWII?

## Guiding Questions

### Adolf Hitler (Document C)

1. Contextualize: Before reading the document, what do you know about the state of affairs in Germany following the end of WWI? Were the Germans happy with their government and the Treaty of Versailles? Explain.
2. Source: Who is Adolf Hitler and what is his relationship to Fascism? Do you think he is a better source on the topic of Fascism than the textbook? Than Mussolini? Explain.
3. Interpret: After reading Hitler's ideas, look back at your previous definitions of Fascism. Is there anything you wish to add? Explain.
4. Close Reading: What does Hitler accuse the Jews of in the last paragraph? Why do you think Hitler brings up the Jews in this way? How do you think Germans might react to this idea?
5. Thinking Critically: Which of Hitler's Fascist ideas do you find the most interesting and/or troubling? How do you think these views might have contributed to the outbreak of WWII?