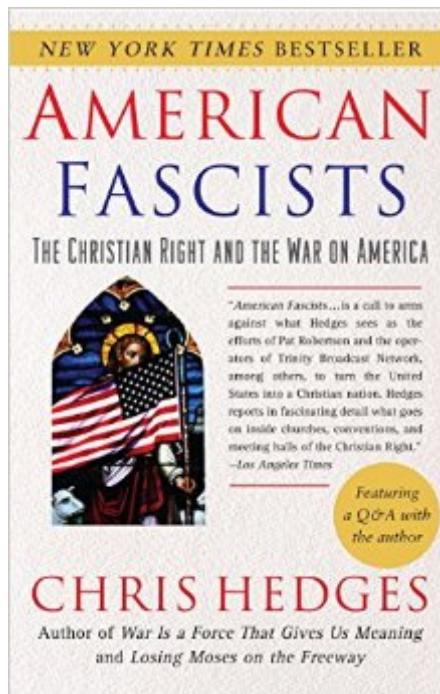


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American Fascists: The Christian Right And The War On America



Synopsis

Twenty-five years ago, when Pat Robertson and other radio and televangelists first spoke of the United States becoming a Christian nation that would build a global Christian empire, it was hard to take such hyperbolic rhetoric seriously. Today, such language no longer sounds like hyperbole but poses, instead, a very real threat to our freedom and our way of life. In *American Fascists*, Chris Hedges, veteran journalist and author of the National Book Award finalist *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*, challenges the Christian Right's religious legitimacy and argues that at its core it is a mass movement fueled by unbridled nationalism and a hatred for the open society. Hedges, who grew up in rural parishes in upstate New York where his father was a Presbyterian pastor, attacks the movement as someone steeped in the Bible and Christian tradition. He points to the hundreds of senators and members of Congress who have earned between 80 and 100 percent approval ratings from the three most influential Christian Right advocacy groups as one of many signs that the movement is burrowing deep inside the American government to subvert it. The movement's call to dismantle the wall between church and state and the intolerance it preaches against all who do not conform to its warped vision of a Christian America are pumped into tens of millions of American homes through Christian television and radio stations, as well as reinforced through the curriculum in Christian schools. The movement's yearning for apocalyptic violence and its assault on dispassionate, intellectual inquiry are laying the foundation for a new, frightening America.

American Fascists, which includes interviews and coverage of events such as pro-life rallies and weeklong classes on conversion techniques, examines the movement's origins, its driving motivations and its dark ideological underpinnings. Hedges argues that the movement currently resembles the young fascist movements in Italy and Germany in the 1920s and '30s, movements that often masked the full extent of their drive for totalitarianism and were willing to make concessions until they achieved unrivaled power. The Christian Right, like these early fascist movements, does not openly call for dictatorship, nor does it use physical violence to suppress opposition. In short, the movement is not yet revolutionary. But the ideological architecture of a Christian fascism is being cemented in place. The movement has roused its followers to a fever pitch of despair and fury. All it will take, Hedges writes, is one more national crisis on the order of September 11 for the Christian Right to make a concerted drive to destroy American democracy. The movement awaits a crisis. At that moment they will reveal themselves for what they truly are -- the American heirs to fascism. Hedges issues a potent, impassioned warning. We face an imminent threat. His book reminds us of the dangers liberal, democratic societies face when they tolerate the intolerant.

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Customer Reviews

Most great artists and thinkers are outsiders in some sense or another. This ability to observe from the outside often uncovers patterns that are invisible because they are too close. Chris Hedges spent most of his adult life outside of the United States, covering wars and despotic regimes. On his return to America, he was able to see our society with an eye unblunted by habit or assumptions, which, combined with his theological education and visceral experience and understanding of totalitarian systems, gives him a uniquely penetrating perspective into the growing movement known as the Christian Right. In "American Fascists," Hedges never makes the simplistic claim that the Christian Right is the Nazi party, or that Bush is Mussolini, or that America will inevitably become a fascist state. His investigation is much more nuanced, identifying the incipient stirrings, invisible to many Americans, of a complex, mass political movement that is mobilizing and gaining strength and support beneath the surface of our democracy. In characteristically muscular and clear prose that fuses the minister and veteran reporter, Hedges not only details multiple facets of the movement, but also examines the ideological undercurrents that drive them and how they translate into political consequences. At The Creation Museum in Petersburg, Kentucky, which "prove[s] that God's word is true," Hedges writes "The danger of creationism is...that it allows all facts to be accepted or discarded according to the dictates of a preordained ideology."

Chris Hedges has all the personal and experiential credentials to take on the Christian

"dominionists" that pose a danger to our democracy and, by extension, the world. First, he is a fine writer. Second, he has covered from the ground most of the wars of the second half of the 20th Century. And third, he thinks deeply and personally about religion, theology, ethics and morality. His admired father was a Presbyterian minister who cared deeply about tolerance and community. Having said all that, Hedges does not pull any punches in equating the small group of dominionists (about 7% of Christians) with the behavior and belief systems that were part and parcel of fascism. He has read deeply in analyses of fascism, such as Hannah Arendt, and, being the good reporter that he is, has attended some of the different gatherings of dominionists and talked to those who have been affected by their involvement in the cult like movements that pass for Christianity. America today faces many internal threats to our democracy. Not least of these threats comes from the imperialistic presidency with which we have been inflicted by Bush and Cheney. Would they were the only purveyors of American imperialism, but they have only taken this bent to a new level. The Christian Right, led by the dominionists, is directly tuned in to this imperialism, turning it into "God's will", with the exciting twist that we are heading for the apocalypse when only the saved will attain heaven. Because these so-called Christians are heavily funded and control a disproportionate number of radio and TV outlets, their influence far exceeds their numbers. Elsewhere, it has been observed that history shows that nations cannot maintain an empire abroad and democracy at home.

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