CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The Machine with a Soul

AN IMPOSING PHOTOGRAPH of Benito Mussolini spanned the first page of the May 1928 issue of the *Saturday Evening Post*, the United States' most-read magazine. It introduced *Post* readers to "Youth"—the first installment of Mussolini's English-language autobiography. The photograph was, in part, a representation of Mussolini as an efficient administrator. Pictured in a black suit and derby hat, he could have been plucked from Fleet Street or Wall Street. Striding forward with purpose, his arms swinging to hasten his pace, Mussolini seemed in lockstep with the tempo of modern life. But this image represented more than a man qualified to manage the demands of a complex, contemporary state. Although dressed in a business suit, Mussolini was not marching down a city street. He was on a beach. The Tyrrhenian sea stretched out to the horizon. Its waves seemed stiller, somehow, than the man on the shore. It was as if the ocean was holding its breath. And from dark clouds descended broad rays of light, like divine fingers, illuminating *Il Duce* (figure 0.1).

By presenting Mussolini as both an administrative whiz and a spiritual icon, the *Saturday Evening Post* suggested that he was the ideal man for the modern age. Richard Washburn Child, a former ambassador to Italy, helped to fashion this portrait of Mussolini as a combination of speed and stillness, materiality and spirituality. Child had been the United States' chief representative in Rome in 1922 when the fascists seized power. By 1928, he was both a writer for the *Post* and the editor of Mussolini's autobiography. Child argued that, as a "miracle administrator," Mussolini had turned the fascist state into a machine that ran. But, as a spiritual leader, Mussolini would create something more: "the machine which will run and has a soul."[1]

The representation of fascism as a machine with a soul lies at the heart of this book because it explains why Italian fascism appealed to some Americans in the interwar years. Child and other American fascist sympathizers were

FIGURE 0.1. Mussolini Walking along the Seashore, 1928.
Courtesy of Cinecitta Luce / Scala, Florence.

ambivalent about modernity. In this, they were far from alone. In the interwar years, American artists and public intellectuals commonly expressed concerns about aspects of modern life, whether the anonymity of cities, pointlessness of consumption, or dulling effects of standardization. Machines featured frequently in these critiques, both as agents of change and metaphors for the modern condition. Child, for instance, described how mechanical production had "stunted" the "soul" of American workers by making them perform repetitive tasks all day long. He also used images of machines to convey impersonal forces. Reflecting on the feelings of disassociation many Americans had toward their democracy in the mid-1920s, Child described the average citizen as a "slave of a tyrant giant machine," caught in a system beyond his capacity to control.[2]

Although Richard Washburn Child and other fascist sympathizers echoed their contemporaries in their critiques of American modernity, they parted ways with most other Americans in their interpretation of Mussolini and his government. In their telling, fascism was an effective system for managing contemporary challenges because it delivered the material benefits of the machine age while protecting Italians from its emotionally draining effects. If the average American worker was little more than a robot on an assembly line, the average Italian was a farmer who cultivated his crops, noted Herbert Schneider, a Columbia University professor. While the mindlessness of his task deadened the spirit of the American worker, a sense of personal responsibility for his yield ensured that the Italian farmer was satisfied with his job, reported Anne O'Hare McCormick, a *New York Times* journalist. And whereas Americans felt disconnected from their democracy, Italians appreciated their government's presence in their everyday lives, according to Generoso Pope, an Italian-American publisher.

These observers believed that such contrasts between Italy and the United States were not due mainly to variations in geography, history, or culture. Rather, they professed that these differences were due to a fascist regime, which had intervened judiciously to manage change. For instance, they argued that the Italian farmer was able to experience the satisfactions of growing a crop because the government had drained the marshlands of Italy and implemented policies that incentivized urban Italians to move to rural areas. And they claimed that the fascists had intentionally reformed democratic institutions to create a government that was more receptive to the needs of ordinary people. In each case, these observers asserted that fascism produced a different kind of modernity from that which prevailed in the United States—one that upheld traditions, restored connections between government and the governed, and rebalanced the relationship between men and machines.

Two (Very Different) Forerunners to This Study

This project did not begin with the notion that Americans sympathized with fascism because they believed that Mussolini was coping better with the problems of modernity. It began with a more basic curiosity. Prior to this study, the most complete work on the question of American fascist sympathizers was John Diggins's *Mussolini and Fascism: The View from America*, published in 1972. In his book, Diggins demonstrated that fascist sympathizers could be found within many areas of American life in the interwar years, including government, universities, the Catholic Church, and the Italian-American community.[3] Diggins argued that various groups supported Mussolini for different reasons: government officials believed he would create stability in Italy; academics were impressed by his apparent pragmatism; Catholic churchmen appreciated his resolution of the state's conflict with the Vatican; and Italian Americans felt immense pride in Italy under *Il Duce*.[4] This variety of responses, Diggins suggested, was a reflection of the protean nature of fascism and of Mussolini himself, who was all things to all men—a part-time statesman, athlete, and warrior, and a full-time fraud.[5]

Diggins succeeded in demonstrating that fascist sympathies were widespread in American society in the interwar years. But beyond their love of Mussolini, he found little in common across the various groups of fascist sympathizers. Reading *Mussolini and Fascism: The View from America* is like looking through a kaleidoscope at hundreds of brightly colored shards: the details are transfixing, and the big picture is hard to process. The absence of a clear picture—or thesis—was partly due to Diggins's methodology. He incorporated the views of scores of Americans who expressed both sympathies with and criticisms of fascism. This broad approach did not allow Diggins to investigate deeply the mental landscape of individuals. Most notably, Diggins analyzed what American fascist sympathizers thought of Italy, but he could devote very little attention to what they thought about the United States.

No historian since Diggins has revisited the question of sympathies with Italian fascism across American society in the interwar years, although some—notably Philip Cannistraro and Peter D'Agostino—have investigated Italian Americans' and the Catholic Church's support for Mussolini's regime.[6] The absence of scholarly contributions to the study of broader American sympathies for fascism has left the field open to polemics. In 2008, the conservative pundit Jonah Goldberg argued that American liberalism was a "totalitarian political religion." For evidence, Goldberg pointed to the American progressives

who simultaneously supported Mussolini and FDR. Goldberg ignored a lot in his version of history, including the American conservatives who admired Mussolini in the interwar years. But then, his objective was not really to write history. Rather, Goldberg used his interpretation of the past to argue that contemporary progressives were self-satisfied elites, intent on harnessing Americans to a gigantic state, and intolerant of anyone who disagreed with them.[7]

Together, Diggins's and Goldberg's contributions to the question of American fascist sympathizers encouraged me to make a contribution of my own. Diggins's research indicated that more work could be done to understand why some Americans sympathized with fascism—to search for commonalities (as well as differences) in the views of Mussolini's American supporters, and to uncover more fully what they thought not just about Italy but also about the United States. Goldberg's *Liberal Fascism* convinced me that there was some urgency in this task, to ensure that warped accounts, which used the evidence selectively to support present-day political agendas, were not the only voices in the debate.[8]

Methodology and Scope

When designing the method and scope of this study, I consciously chose an approach that was different from Diggins's. While Diggins considered the views of many Americans who expressed sympathetic views toward Mussolini, I decided to analyze in depth the intellectual biographies and activities of four American fascist sympathizers. This approach would enable me to consider fascist sympathizers' opinions about both Italy and the United States in equal measure, to contextualize their views within American culture in the interwar years, and to consider how they used Italy to influence policy and public discourse in the United States.

When selecting individuals to research, I had three basic criteria. First, they had to have expressed positive sentiments about fascism for a relatively long period—around a decade or more. This would allow for a sustained investigation that assessed how the same individual's views changed over time. Second, they needed to represent various walks of American life. This would avoid giving the impression (perpetuated by Goldberg, among others) that fascist sympathies were the unique preserve of any one group of Americans. Third, these individuals needed to be men and women of significant influence, whether that influence was on policymakers in Italy and the United States or on a broader swath of American public opinion.

Based on these criteria, I selected four individuals for an in-depth study of fascist sympathies: Richard Washburn Child, the diplomat and writer; Anne O'Hare McCormick, the *New York Times* journalist; Generoso Pope, the Italian-American community leader; and Herbert Wallace Schneider, the professor of moral philosophy.

A large body of source material is associated with these four Americans. Their correspondence and related papers are housed in public archives, including the National Archives and Records Administration and the Franklin Roosevelt Library in the United States, and the Central State Archives and the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Italy. I analyzed papers in these archives in part to determine the extent to which Child, McCormick, Pope, and Schneider influenced domestic and foreign policies in both countries.

Published materials authored by these individuals are also copious, amounting to hundreds of newspaper and magazine articles and dozens of books. I analyzed these published sources informed by theories, articulated as early as 1926 by the philosopher and sociologist George H. Mead. Mead argued that most news stories had an "aesthetic function," which helped readers to make sense of their relationship to their communities, nation, and the wider world. Whether the topic was the Florida real estate boom, the difficulties of enforcing Prohibition, or the future of Bolshevism in Russia, it would resonate with readers insofar as it enabled them to see their own connection to the story.[9] I read Child, McCormick, Pope, and Schneider's published works with a particular attentiveness to their imagery and narrative techniques, and an awareness of their historical context, so as to understand the salience to contemporary readers of the stories they told.

Four Fascist Sympathizers

Richard Washburn Child

Born in Massachusetts in 1880, Richard Washburn Child (figure 0.2) grew up on the outer edges of the American establishment. His father was the proprietor of a boot and shoe company, which he had inherited from his own father and ran poorly.[10] Richard attended Milton—a boarding school in his home state—and then Harvard University. The *Saturday Evening Post* published his first short story while he was still an undergraduate.[11] Child went on to law school, but he was always more of a writer than he was a lawyer.[12]

Child's first job was as the Washington correspondent for a new magazine, *Ridgway's*. He approached the position with a mixture of contempt and

FIGURE 0.2. Richard Washburn Child, 1924.
Source: National Photo Company Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

calculation. The job itself had little merit, he wrote to his father upon taking up the position in the fall of 1906. But it was useful "as a means to step into a big place, up and out." Within a few months, it was clear that the magazine was faltering. Child wanted to get out. Rather than quit, he hoped to be fired, since the severance could be three hundred dollars or more. In the meantime, he felt like he was "treading water in a rather dirty stream."[13] He often felt that way.

Child made his living over the next few years by writing short stories for more successful magazines, including *McClure's*, *Collier's*, and the *Saturday Evening Post*. He set up his own law office in Boston in 1911. But either his heart was not in it or the money was not enough.[14] He moved on quickly. By 1912, Child was working for the Progressive Party, supporting his uncle's campaign to become governor of Massachusetts.[15] He cultivated a relationship with the leader of the Progressives, Theodore Roosevelt. In one letter, Child advised Roosevelt that someone on his campaign team ought to attack Woodrow Wilson as a narrow autocrat who was temperamentally unfit for office (although

he himself refused to do that particular piece of dirty work on the candidate's behalf).[16] Child cherished his passing connection to Roosevelt, and traded on it for decades to come. TR embodied muscular patriotism with a touch of the "he-man"—qualities that Child admired.[17]

Following a brief stint at the Treasury Department during the war, Child assumed editorship of *Collier's* in 1919.[18] He had, by then, published more than one hundred and fifty short stories in various magazines, and almost no nonfiction. By 1920, he was working as a speechwriter and adviser for Republican presidential candidate Warren Harding.[19] According to Child, the two men got on well, drafting speeches the old-fashioned way, hunched together over a table, with soft lead pencils and plenty of rough paper. No stenographer for Harding and Child![20] The new president appointed Child ambassador to Italy in 1921, to thank him for his contributions to the (notoriously unscrupulous) political campaign.[21]

In the 1920s, Child was a staunch proponent of a conservative worldview. He esteemed individuals and nations who minded "their own business" and argued that the best possible government was the "least possible government."[22] Child's political philosophy changed—or at least appeared to—in 1932, when the depth of the Great Depression and the momentum of Franklin Roosevelt's presidential campaign prompted him to back the Democratic candidate and to express a more capacious view of government's role in Americans' lives.[23] Fickle in his party politics, Child was constant in one regard. Throughout, he expressed a love for big characters—leaders of "breadth," who exhibited their own humanity.[24] To put it mildly, he was drawn to charismatic men. Child put it in blunter terms, in a rare moment of self-criticism: he had "a weakness for listening to charlatans."[25]

As Child's transitions across party lines suggest, he worked hard to align himself with whoever had the most power in Washington, DC. His efforts had mixed results. His direct influence on policymaking circles was greatest between 1921 and 1924, when he was ambassador to Italy. His analysis of the fascist movement and the new Italian prime minister contributed to Washington's positive reception of Mussolini.[26] But after the death of Warren Harding, Child struggled to influence decisionmakers in Washington: he was a marginal figure in the administration of Calvin Coolidge; he had no official role in Herbert Hoover's presidency; and Franklin Roosevelt distrusted him and kept him at a distance.[27]

Child's insecure public position paralleled his unstable personal life. He obsessed about money. He drank too much. He divorced three times and married four.[28] His attitude toward his first wife, Elizabeth Westfield, offers some insights into his character. The couple divorced, after a ten-year marriage, in 1916. Child

married a fellow writer, Maude Parker, that same year.[29] While he was ambassador in Rome, Child received word that Elizabeth had died. The news inspired him to reflect on her "sweet and fine soul." He could have chosen to stay in that marriage, he wrote to his father, but it would have come at the expense of his own life, "Maude's development," the creation of their daughters, and the contribution of all of them "to the world." In his mind, the "cost of staying with Elizabeth" was too high; he could not "pay it." Perhaps it was no coincidence that he phrased it all in monetary terms. Swiftly, Child moved on to discussion of Elizabeth's estate—the "furniture, books, silver, rugs" that ought to be heading his way. He asked his father to make the necessary inquiries on his behalf, since he "did not even know where Elizabeth was living or in what city."[30] Sometimes, Child tempered his narcissism with self-flagellation. "I may be rated as 'difficult' in temperament," he wrote soon after Elizabeth's death, as his marriage to Maude Parker disintegrated.[31] He had "made a lot of errors from Christ's point of view."[32]

Child was crumbly on the inside. He did not go from one plum job to another, which was his desire, after his tour in Rome. But despite his private failures and public shortcomings, he exerted sustained influence on American culture through his work for the *Saturday Evening Post*. More than two million Americans subscribed to the *Post* in the early 1920s, and readership continued to rise over the course of the decade. The magazine's editor, George Horace Lorimer, dictated the *Post*'s editorial line, championing individual initiative, old-fashioned values, and small government.[33] Child wrote more than seventy articles for the *Post* between 1924 and 1932, in addition to editing Mussolini's serialized autobiography. In this capacity, Child addressed a variety of topics, including the American presidency, domestic policy concerns, and politics in Europe—as well as in Italy, in particular. He described conditions that resonated with his readers, such as the growing complexity of everyday life, the feeling of disconnection between government and the governed, and the decline of traditional values. And he looked abroad for signs that might point Americans home.

Anne O'Hare McCormick

Richard Washburn Child was an exact contemporary of Anne O'Hare McCormick (figure 0.3). But Child and McCormick were perhaps as unalike as two journalists who sympathized with fascism could be. While Child touted his Brahmin credentials, McCormick's family were recent immigrants, of Irish stock.[34] Thomas and Teresa O'Hare moved to America when Anne was a baby, and made Columbus, Ohio, their home. Thomas was regional manager for the

FIGURE 0.3. Anne O'Hare McCormick, 1937. *Source:* New York World-Telegram and the Sun Newspaper Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

Home-Life insurance company. Teresa wrote poetry. Anne and her younger sisters attended convent schools, where Anne, in particular, excelled in rhetoric, Latin, and church history.[35]

When Anne was poised to graduate from school, Thomas ran into financial problems. He abandoned his wife and three girls. Teresa tried to support the family by selling dry goods, as well as a book of her poetry, door-to-door.[36] Teresa's collection of poems blended religious meditations with intensely personal reflections. "That was not Love, that poor weak flame that died; / It was a taper that lit passion's pride," she wrote, presumably with Thomas in mind.[37]

Teresa moved her daughters to Cleveland. There, Anne saw terrifying versions of the insecurity that her own family had experienced. The city's population was burgeoning, and many newcomers were foreign-born. They had come to Cleveland to work in steel mills, build ships, and make mechanical parts, furnaces, and sewing machines. Mansions lined Euclid Avenue. But the

working poor struggled to survive.[38] Due to their education and connections, the O'Hares escaped the worst of this fate.[39] But Anne's proximity to such precariousness, as well as her religious faith, informed her conviction that Americans must help those who suffered under industrialization.

Both Teresa and Anne found work at a diocesan newspaper, the *Catholic Universe*, and a 1907 pilgrimage to Rome gave Anne the opportunity to write her first foreign correspondence. In these reports from Europe, she reflected on tensions that would occupy her for decades to come—between church and state, capital and labor, tradition and modernity. Anne's work at the *Universe* also helped her to develop elements of her journalistic style. She planted vignettes. From Assisi, for instance, she described a car journey as a jarring disruption to the town's contemplative atmosphere.[40] By suggesting that the car, as a symbol of the machine age, upended spiritual life, she aimed to convey an emotional truth that might resonate with her readers. Anne was an instinctive entrepreneur. In 1910, she married Francis McCormick, a Dayton importer. Accompanying Francis on business trips to Europe, Anne wrote poems and travel articles, which were picked up by *Bookman*, *Catholic World*, *Atlantic Monthly*, and *Reader Magazine*.[41] A 1918 poem, "Pompeii," conveyed the persistence of life following mass devastation—the "silence like a voice" that flowed through "muted streams."[42]

In 1920, she approached the managing editor of the *New York Times*, and fellow Ohioan, Carr Van Anda, with a proposal: she would write impressionistic pieces on postwar Europe; the paper would pay per article. It was an ambitious leap for McCormick. But it was a zero-risk deal for the paper, which had to pay neither a salary nor travel expenses. Anne O'Hare McCormick entered her career as a foreign correspondent for the *Times* through the back door, which seemed the only way for a woman to enter it at all in 1920.[43] She arrived in Naples that summer; the newspaper published her first article—"New Italy of the Italians"—on the front page of its Sunday magazine section at the end of the year.[44]

McCormick assumed a mounting influence over American culture and policymaking over the course of the interwar years. Her journalism from Italy was instrumental in advancing her career: she was one of the earliest American journalists to report on the rising fascist movement, and in 1926, she interviewed Mussolini for the first time.[45] Interviews such as this sealed her reputation as a talented writer, capable of humanizing powerful men and translating their policies into terms that her readers could readily understand.[46]

McCormick's political progressivism, Democratic affiliations, and capacity to distill the essence of a man and his policies to the public made her a useful ally for Franklin Roosevelt. Rarely one to miss a public relations opportunity,

Roosevelt used McCormick wisely, to both of their advantages. FDR and McCormick met on numerous occasions in the mid- to late 1930s. During their meetings, the president mined the journalist for her insights into the situation in Europe; the journalist, in turn, mined the president for his views on the changing role of government in the lives of ordinary Americans.[47] A colleague described McCormick's interviews with Roosevelt as "intimate" records that provided insights into his "mind at work on the job."[48] She excelled in this kind of journalism—making big men sympathetic and big ideas understandable.

By the mid-1930s, Anne O'Hare McCormick had established herself as an authority on European affairs—someone with a keen sense of the public mood in various countries, and access to leaders, including Mussolini and Hitler.[49] At the same time, she had built her reputation as an acute observer of the United States. She traveled frequently across the country, reporting on the experiences of Americans in the Midwest, the West, and the South. Drawing on personal anecdotes and snippets of conversation, she relayed ordinary people's anxieties and aspirations to readers of the *New York Times*.[50] McCormick was at her most compelling as a chronicler of the human experience, an artful assembler of details that, combined, told Americans so much about the challenges they faced in the modern world.

The *Times* promoted McCormick onto the newspaper's editorial board in 1936 (she was the first woman ever to occupy this role), and gave her a column devoted to European affairs (another first, not just for a female journalist, but for the newspaper). In 1937, McCormick won a Pulitzer Prize for her European correspondence.[51] She was a very good writer. She had a poet's feel for the redolent detail. One of her colleagues estimated that she was able to "enter almost personally into the hearts and minds" of her readers.[52] It was a talent that was as powerful as it was rare.

Generoso Pope

For his first fifteen years, Generoso Papa (figure 0.4) lived in a hamlet, close to the village of Arpaise, in rural Campania. His mother died when he was six. Generoso migrated to the United States in 1906. He arrived in New York with a stiletto knife and "ten dollars' worth of lire in his pocket," according to family history.[53]

Generoso rose. His first job was underground. He delivered water to the men who dug the subways. Within a year, he was just below sea level, working

FIGURE 0.4. Generoso Pope, 1937.
Courtesy of Bettmann via Getty Images.

as a laborer in the sand quarries of Long Island. Opposition to a walkout endeared him to his bosses, who promoted him to foreman. By the age of twenty-one, he was a supervisor on the docks for the Colonial Sand & Stone Company. Generoso became an American citizen and changed his last name to Pope. In 1916, he took on all the debt of Colonial, which was bankrupt, in exchange for full management and a fifty percent share. Only ten years had passed since he had crossed the Atlantic. Pope turned the fortunes of Colonial Sand & Stone around. He had acumen. This extended to his choice of associates. He counted the mobster Frank Costello among his few good friends, and gave Jimmy Walker $10,000 to support his successful bid for mayor. Contracts flooded in. Competitors folded. By 1927, Colonial Sand & Stone belonged to Pope alone.[54]

Pope understood how politics mixed with business in New York. He aimed to "build" constituencies of Italian-American, Democratic voters and "trade" these for municipal sand and cement contracts.[55] In 1925, Pope had helped to garner votes for Walker through Italian-American political clubs. He would continue to use these personal channels to influence the political fortunes of

Democratic candidates. But when the nation's largest-circulating Italian-language newspaper, *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, came up for sale in 1928, he saw an opportunity to forge votes on a much grander scale. Pope paid more than two million dollars for a newspaper that hovered on the edge of bankruptcy, based on a calculation of *Il Progresso*'s capacity to shape Italian Americans' voting behavior, and an expectation of the contracts that would flow to him as a result.[56]

Pope was not alone in appreciating *Il Progresso*'s value. Its owner until 1928 had been a steadfast supporter of fascism, and, with his passing, the Italian government was concerned about the newspaper's future. William Randolph Hearst was interested in an acquisition. Although Hearst was a fan of Mussolini, the regime worried about the reliability of his support. The Italian consul general in New York pressured the vendors of *Il Progresso* to sell to Pope.[57] And upon purchase, he signaled to the fascist government that their mouthpiece in America was in safe hands: "the policies and personnel of the paper would remain the same," he announced.[58]

In a private meeting with Mussolini in Rome, in the summer of 1929, Pope assured *Il Duce* that he would continue to sustain fascism, if the government supported his bid for another Italian-American newspaper, *Il Corriere d'America*. Pope relished in quid pro quos. Over the next three years, he acquired three newspapers—*Il Corriere*, *Il Bolettino della Sera*, and the Philadelphia daily, *L'Opinione*—expanding his influence over Italian-American opinion.[59] The fascist government recognized Pope as a valuable ally who could shape the sympathies of the Italian diaspora and the policies of the American government. The benefits of this relationship ran both ways. Every single day, Pope's newspapers disseminated stories of Mussolini's popularity and fascism's success. Pope also intervened with American policymakers on the regime's behalf.[60] In turn, Mussolini's government gave Pope public affirmation of his own importance, of the kind he craved. Jimmy Walker bestowed his first title—Order of the Chevalier of the Crown of Italy—on behalf of King Vittorio Emanuele III, in New York in 1926.[61] The regime organized a second honor—Commander of the Crown of Italy—prior to Pope's visit in 1929.[62]

Generoso Pope's newspaper empire also boosted his usefulness to the Democratic Party. He used his platform to strengthen Italian Americans as a political force; in frequent editorials, he encouraged his fellow ethnics to claim citizenship, reminded them of their duty to vote, and steered them toward Democratic candidates.[63] Mayor Jimmy Walker, Senator Robert Wagner, and Governor Franklin Roosevelt cultivated relationships with Pope, recognizing that positive coverage in *Il Progresso* would result in votes in their favor on

election day.[64] The ties between Roosevelt and Pope tightened after Roosevelt moved into the White House, especially in the second half of the 1930s, as diplomatic relations between Italy and the United States strained. More than ever before, the publisher needed the president to prop up his reputation as a loyal American. And, more than ever before, the president needed the publisher to secure votes. In private, Franklin Roosevelt sometimes expressed distaste for Generoso Pope, but politics dictated that the two men appeared in public as allies and friends.[65]

Herbert Wallace Schneider

Herbert Wallace Schneider (figure 0.5) was born in 1892 in the small town of Berea, Ohio. His father was a professor of theology at the local German college. Schneider would remember his childhood as calm and secure. There was a ritualistic quality to his family's day, punctuated by morning and evening prayers and hymns in the German Pietist tradition. Church was a large part of their life, and Herbert loved the services, the religious activities, and especially the music. His family's milieu was entirely German-American, Protestant, and predominantly academic. Polish Catholics, who worked in the quarries and made grindstones, lived on the other side of the town. Herbert had no contact with the children of these families except when they skated out onto the frozen lakes in the winter.[66]

In 1909, the family moved to Brooklyn, in part so that Herbert could receive a good high school education. His father became the pastor at a Methodist church near Bushwick Avenue, where the older people spoke German and the young people spoke English. The family lived in the parsonage next door. In Brooklyn, the Schneiders reproduced many elements of their prior, small-town existence, at least in Herbert's memory. Their social life revolved around church picnics, activities, and clubs. Herbert went to Brooklyn Boys' High School, which trained him in classics, and then on to City College. After three semesters, he earned a scholarship for Columbia University.[67]

The intellectual ambience of Columbia University in the 1910s and early 1920s shaped Herbert Schneider. As an undergraduate, he took graduate-level philosophy classes. He stayed on for a doctorate, under the supervision of the renowned moral philosopher, John Dewey. Schneider was impressed by the pragmatists' view of philosophy as a mode of action, and he developed a version of instrumentalism that was far more strident than Dewey's own.[68] According to Schneider's conception, norms had no value independent of their effects. He argued that any thought that "'gets you somewhere' (intellectually speaking)" was a

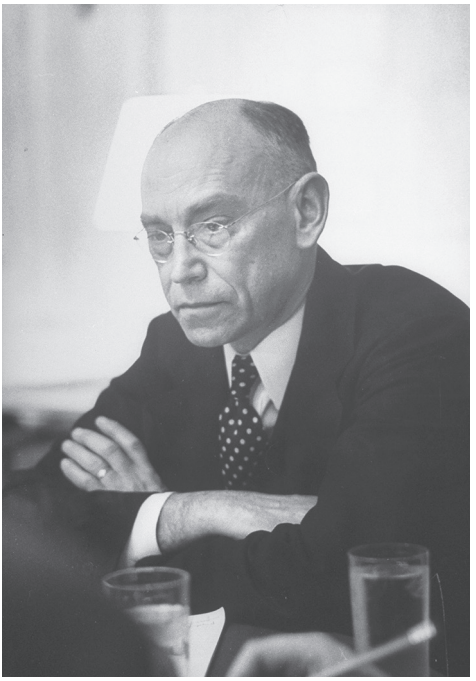

FIGURE 0.5. Herbert Wallace Schneider, 1948. Courtesy of Leonard McCombe, The Life Images Collection via Getty Images.

"good" one; it was not the job of a philosopher to judge whether that destination was ethical or not.[69] In his doctoral thesis, Schneider observed that an idea, such as democracy, was all too often held up as "an ultimate standard" rather than as a means to an end. Such normative absolutism, he argued, prevented social progress.[70] Unlike Child, the sometime Republican, or McCormick and Pope, the committed Democrats, Schneider expressed no public affiliation to one American political party or another. But his agnosticism extended beyond political parties, to entire systems of government. Function trumped all in Schneider's worldview: for him, Democrat or Republican, democracy or dictatorship, mattered less than whether or not the government worked.

In 1926, the influential political scientist Charles Merriam nominated Schneider for a prestigious fellowship from the Social Science Research Council to study fascism in Italy.[71] Schneider's research resulted in a book and a handful of articles, which established him as an authority on Mussolini's regime.[72] His peers responded positively to his analysis, arguing that his research demonstrated the

significance of fascism for the modern world.[73] Schneider's work fitted within the zeitgeist of contemporary political science, which challenged reflexive American exceptionalism by ranking objectivity over morality.[74] So enamored was his audience by Schneider's seemingly cold dissection of the truth that only one reviewer paused to reflect on his data. William Yandell Elliott of Harvard noted that Schneider had made no use of the voices of antifascist exiles.[75] It was the fascists, not the facts, who did all the talking in Schneider's work.

One well-reviewed book led to another, and in 1929, Merriam asked Schneider to co-author a study of civic education in Italy.[76] The book was part of a two-year research project, headed by Merriam, that compared methods for "making citizens" across eight countries, including Italy and the United States. The collaborative nature of the work meant that Schneider's observations fanned out among his peers, while Merriam's tacit endorsement boosted his credibility. Informed by Schneider's findings, Merriam suggested that fascist Italy had been successful where most states had failed in adjusting to the changing times.[77]

Schneider's scholarship on fascism culminated in a 1934 award from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace for a visiting professorship in Rome, at a university headed by Giacomo Acerbo, a fascist economist and politician.[78] By then, Schneider had also developed his expertise in the field of religion. In many ways, Schneider assessed fascism as he would a religion. He examined its rituals, ceremonies, and customs. He measured its success based on its apparent capacity to inspire, galvanize, and bind its followers. He analyzed the sometimes overlapping, sometimes competitive relationship between fascism and Catholicism as he would analyze two religions that coexisted within one state. He adopted an air of moral neutrality around fascism, much as he adopted an agnosticism with regard to various religions.[79]

At least with regard to fascism, this approach was problematic. Schneider never considered the toll that fascism had on human beings, perhaps because this might have required him to adopt a moral stance that he was steadfastly unwilling to take. He built his observations on the evidence that he had at his disposal: fascist propaganda, the various charters and laws of the Italian state, and the words of friendly government officials. His methodology was the equivalent of researching Christianity by going to church, reading the Bible, and talking to some priests. The news was almost always good, and the distance between myth and reality often great.

In sum, Richard Washburn Child, Anne O'Hare McCormick, Generoso Pope, and Herbert Schneider came from a cross-section of American society and asserted their influence through quite different channels. Child was the

product of an elite upbringing and education, and a long-standing conservative. McCormick came from far more modest origins and was progressive in her politics. Pope was an immigrant, businessman, publisher, and Democratic Party powerbroker. Schneider was a scholar and teacher, who kept himself one step removed from American party politics. Despite their differences, all these individuals expressed sustained sympathies for fascist Italy. This book explains why.

What Explains Fascist Sympathies?

It is intuitive that one woman and three men as different in their intellectual backgrounds, politics, activities, and proclivities as McCormick, Child, Pope, and Schneider would view the fascist state from different angles. For Anne O'Hare McCormick, a liberal Catholic, the new regime promised the resolution of two conflicts that concerned her very much: one between the church and state, which stymied the pope's temporal powers; and one between capital and labor, which labor invariably lost.[80] To Richard Washburn Child, a conservative, Mussolini offered stability, and—initially at least—a *laissez-faire* approach to economics that would allow businesses to thrive.[81] For Generoso Pope, and many Italian Americans, fascism's claims to order and progress offered gratifying ripostes to nativist stereotypes of Italians as anarchic and archaic.[82] And for Herbert Schneider, a political philosopher, the fascist state seemed to be proof positive of the pragmatists' proposition that the best kind of government was a government that worked.[83] In so far as this study demonstrates that these very different Americans were attracted to fascism for different reasons, then, it supports the arguments of John Diggins, as well as the work of those historians who have considered why discrete groups within American society supported Mussolini's regime.[84]

But this study is not only—or even mainly—about the different reasons why Americans from various walks of life supported fascism. Rather, it is about the common ground that these individuals occupied, in spite of their differences. Child, a conservative writer for a popular magazine; McCormick, a progressive Catholic journalist at the nation's most respected broadsheet; Pope, a businessman, publisher, and powerbroker; and Schneider, an academic schooled in the philosophy of instrumentalism—all worried about the impact of economic, social, and cultural change on the United States and argued that Italy was coping better with the challenges that such changes entailed. Each of these Americans saw fascism as a means of harnessing the benefits of modernity, while resisting its anesthetizing effects. They used fascism's apparent successes to highlight what was wrong in the United States,

to offer examples for what Americans could do, and to provide their countrymen with something that filled a lacuna in their own lives.

From the early 1920s to the late 1930s, Child, McCormick, Pope, and Schneider retained their overarching concern with how Italy and the United States were coping with the challenges of modernity. But the interplay of events in Italy and the United States, current themes in fascist propaganda, and American cultural, economic, and political preoccupations affected the specific issues they explored at any given time.

In the early 1920s, as fascist squads engaged in street fights against their political enemies in Italy, the United States returned to peacetime routines of work, consumption, and leisure. As shown in chapter 1, Child, McCormick, and Schneider rendered young fascists as embodiments of a martial ideal to argue that the ennui of modern times was more damaging to society than war.

In the mid-decade, the United States experienced unprecedented rates of economic growth, fueled by speculation and consumption, which provoked concerns about the erosion of older ideals of benevolence, sobriety, and self-control. Chapter 2 describes how Child, McCormick, and Pope used images of Mussolini as a man of old-fashioned values and modern capacities both to critique American culture and to send a reassuring message that it was possible to combine the best of old and new in the contemporary age.

At the decade's end, American political scientists and cultural commentators voiced growing concerns over an apparent mismatch between the static institutions of democracy and the dynamic forces of society. Chapter 3 shows how all four of these American fascist sympathizers invoked the fascist corporate state to highlight weaknesses in the democratic system and to suggest possible reforms in the United States.

In the early 1930s, fascist propaganda asserted that Italy had withstood the worst of the global depression by enabling a return to simpler ways of life. Chapter 4 analyzes how Child, McCormick, Schneider, and Pope used Italy's apparent success to call for policy interventions in the United States that would both enable a short-term recovery from the depression and ensure a long-term recalibration of the relationship between humans and machines.

As shown in chapter 5, in the mid-1930s, these observers responded to an increasingly authoritarian Italy by reproducing images of Italy and Ethiopia as gardens, so as to offer Americans experiences of control, beauty, and even peace, which were lacking in their own unstable nation and an increasingly volatile world.

It was not until the late 1930s, as fascist Italy drew closer with Nazi Germany, issued anti-Jewish edicts, and embarked on a path that would lead to

global conflagration, that these observers withdrew their support from Mussolini. They did so with various degrees of silence and noise, and only oblique expressions of remorse.

Why American Fascist Sympathizers Matter

By understanding why Americans of such different backgrounds sympathized with Italian fascism in the interwar years, we can learn something about the nature of the fascist regime—at least as it presented itself. We can also gain insights into the prevailing anxieties and policy challenges of the United States in the interwar years. Last, a fuller understanding of the history of American fascist sympathies has implications for our contemporary societies, as they grapple with cultural, social, and economic change.

The research presented in this study shows that to understand the appeal of Italian fascism, we need to confront its relationship with modernity. As such, it supports the work of other historians—most notably, Emilio Gentile, Ruth Ben-Ghiat, and Roger Griffin—who have attempted to parse out fascism's complex attitude toward the modern world.[85] The responses of American fascist sympathizers show that various tendencies within fascism that might appear contradictory from our vantage point—such as the regime's embrace of modern technology alongside its promotion of rural communities—seemed to be consistent to some contemporary observers. Indeed, for Child, McCormick, Pope, and Schneider, fascism's genius lay at the meeting point between modernity and tradition. This does not suggest that Italian fascism in practice was consistent—too many historians have demonstrated that the regime was riven with internal schisms, and survived for as long as it did because Mussolini was an opportunist, rather than a purist.[86] But it does show that we underestimate fascism if we dismiss it as an eclectic mishmash merely because it seems so to us. Fascism appealed to these observers because it claimed to reconcile the clash between new and old, by ensuring that machines edified rather than eroded the souls of women and men.

By focusing on these four Americans' responses to fascism, this book also helps us to understand modernity as many interwar Americans saw and felt it—as a convergence of individual experiences and an acceleration of materialism, which deprived humanity of its texture and drained living of its meaning. Child, McCormick, Pope, and Schneider stayed in the mainstream of American society in the 1920s and 1930s because they addressed issues that concerned many of their contemporaries, including those who opposed fascism:

the erosion of values of service and honor; the impact of a get-rich-quick ethos; the obsolescence of democratic institutions; the devastating economic and cultural effects of mass-production; and the sense that men and women were overwhelmed by forces beyond their capacity to control. By contextualizing fascist sympathizers' views about modernity, and by demonstrating that these individuals spoke to various public and policy audiences who were eager to hear their words, this book provides insights into the temper and tone of the United States in the interwar years. It shows that the anxieties of these fascist sympathizers were American anxieties.

Last, as the United States grapples with a period of extraordinarily divisive politics, in which each side labels the other fascistic and neo-fascists are emboldened in the public sphere, this book offers a timely dissection of why some Americans were attracted to Italian fascism in the interwar years. In contrast to pundits who use distorted versions of history to argue that fascist sympathies are unique to progressives and Democrats in the United States, I demonstrate that, in the interwar years, fascism appealed to four Americans from very different walks of life because they believed that Mussolini's Italy was managing better with the transition to modernity than the United States. These fascist sympathizers wrote for and spoke to those Americans who felt threatened by various changes, including the decline of communities, the erosion of traditional values, and the sense that the machine—as both a literal presence and a metaphor for modernity—dominated mankind. In the 1920s and up until 1933, Child, McCormick, Pope, and Schneider argued that the United States' political leaders had failed to make democracy relevant, to manage the pace of industrialization, and to support those who felt left behind in the modern world. And even after Roosevelt rolled out the New Deal, they argued that more should and could be done to manage the transition to modernity. If this study suggests a lesson in our present circumstances, the lesson is here. When a system of government fails to protect those damaged by transitions, it will provoke feelings of disenchantment, both with that system of government and with the rate and impact of cultural, social, and economic change. Disenchanted people may seethe quietly. Or they may look for alternative forms of government that promise the restoration of past values, the protection of embattled communities, and the assurance that they—and not outside forces—are in control.

INDEX