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Rhetorical Analysis: George Wallace

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Rhetorical Analysis: George Wallace

Fascism as an ideology is inherently contradictory. It's an amalgamation of a dizzying array of ideas that are irreconcilable with each other. Ahistoricism and faulty political theory within the core lead to an ultraright, ultranationalist ideological core that inevitably leads to authoritarianism within governance. These are the basics, but the most important facet to recognize is that even the most radical adherents of Fascism acknowledge the inconsistencies within their political theory, and they do not care. Acquiring power is the endgame, implementing anything separate from the core ideological tenets (suppressing the left, the creation of homogeneous society by forceable removal of populations believed to not fit in the national schema, expansion of territory through militarism) is inconsequential, the brute force execution of power with the express purpose of maintaining an extreme vision of the status quo is the goal of Fascist ideology.

This particular theme is exemplified in George Wallace's "Segregation Now, Segregation Tomorrow, Segregation Forever" speech. Spoken in front of the Alabama State Capitol after his inauguration as governor to a crowd of rip-roaring Alabamians, Wallace expounded upon his belief in the "tyranny" of the Federal government, the evils of progressivism, and how civil and human rights were antithetical to the American core of the individual.

The governor begins by appealing to the audience's shared history, of ties to the Anglo-Saxon soil and the Confederacy, of his place among great Southern leaders such as Jefferson Davis. Wallace calls upon freedom-loving Southerners everywhere to oppose tyranny, and support the system of segregation, now and forever. Ignoring the fact that the concept of Jim Crow is antithetical to freedom in and of itself, the rhetoric here relies on the fact that segregation was based on the doctrine of "separate, but equal." At this time, it was well-known throughout American society, particularly to white Southerners, that Jim Crow had created a reality for a segment of the population that was decidedly not equal, exemplified by the presence of underfunded schools, redlined districts, segregated housing, and lower-paying jobs.

When Wallace referenced Confederate history and presented a visceral opposition to integration, it tapped into a deep sadness and fury at the historical outcome of the Civil War, that their way of life had been infringed upon and that their sociological schema had been ruptured. On an intuitive level, Southerners still sympathetic with the Confederate plight knew that African Americans used to have a status of property and attempts to create an equality of opportunity for them was abhorrent and a reminder of a deep injury felt throughout the White, Southern consciousness. Referencing the passage of the 14th amendment also played the dual role of appealing to the audience's nationalist and racist beliefs. The current federal government was continuing the work of the illegal Reconstruction amendments, with Wallace using the rationale of governmental overstep into States' rights as a dog whistle for the racial hierarchy coming under attack once again.

When discussing the history of the South, particularly about slavery, the Civil War, and the Reconstruction, apologists for the South will often utilize ahistorical rhetoric to push any point that shifts the blame to actors other than the Confederacy. This is done solely for the

purpose of creating a scapegoat, of creating a villain where there already is one. This is also exemplified in the Wallace's idea of the "tyranny" of central government and "communists" pushing an agenda on a global white minority.

This rhetoric continued further, with lines of Wallace's speech explicating on the ideas of a tyrannical government that could only be saved by the ideology of the South. The subtext of his discourse is that of the South imposing its will on the rest of the United States. The authoritarian tendencies are ever-present in his calls for "freedom-loving" southerners throughout the continental United States to join him in his fight. His speech featured prominently the idea of Southern heritage within governance, drawing back towards the Founders such as Thomas Jefferson and George Washington and their southern pedigree. This is meant to be evocative of the Confederacy and the children of the War of Northern Aggression's place within American society and their belief that it's their right to control the racial hierarchy of the South. Wallace concludes his speech on the same note, drawing an ahistorical parallel between actual instances of voter suppression after the passage of the 14th amendment and the "loyal" southerner's denial of suffrage at the end of the civil war.

Wallace's speech has fascistic tendencies. American society compared to that of Italy and Germany diverges from certain rhetorical tricks used by leaders of the 30s, utilizing ideas of freedom and liberty being under attack by large, malevolent forces that can only be stopped by patriotic do-gooders. During this particular time period as well, it wasn't acceptable to support Nazism. Wallace, in this regard, utilizes an idea that a "rot" overtook Hitler and Nazi Germany. "Not so long ago, men stood in marvel and awe at the cities, the buildings, the schools, the autobahns that the government of Hitler's Germany had built...but it could not stand... for the system that had built it had rotted the soul of the builders..." Notice that there's not an outright

condemnation of the ideology itself, but a deflection of the blame to the moral “rot” of the dogma, not the core tenets of the philosophy. A contemporary study of what Fascism is would also assail that assigning the blame to a metaphysical concept of decay rather than the deeds of the perpetrators is an incorrect analysis.

To conclude this analysis, recognizing the particular ideas spouted throughout Wallace’s most famous speech is vital to understanding the present, as these concepts’ cores remain the same in the progression of history. These philosophies remain staples and fundamental aspects of the ideologies of many, and their proclivity to affect contemporary discourse should not be underestimated.

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