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This chapter examines the relationship between Italian universities and Mussolini’s dictatorship. What role, if any, did Italian universities play in consolidating and sustaining Fascist rule, and how successful were they as agents of Fascist elite formation? How and to what extent did the dictatorship change Italian universities and academic culture? While Italian universities operated as part of a specific regime of power during the dictatorship, they were also operated on by that regime of power, which saw them as instruments to fulfill a triple imperative: to build a mass totalitarian regime, to craft a specifically “fascist” culture to support it, and to form a new elite that would perpetuate that culture and that regime through space and time. These long-term projects, which occasioned changes in university structures, personnel, and curricula, were periodically rethought as power relations changed between the Italian state and the National Fascist Party (PNF) and as police informers and other sources communicated the potential for collective disaffection among the university students who were to form Fascism’s future managerial class. Investigating the relationship of Italian universities and the dictatorship offers a means of evaluating the interactions of high culture and politics, the vicissitudes of the party-state relationship, and the formation of a generation that would furnish Italy’s leadership class after 1945.

As the central component of Fascist projects of political socialization and elite formation, the university during Fascism also offers a privileged
viewpoint on what Emilio Gentile calls "the Italian way to totalitarianism." Although an earlier tradition of scholarship held that Italian Fascism was, at most, an "imperfect totalitarianism," incapable of penetrating Italian cultural or social life, more recent works have emphasized the repressive aspects of Mussolini's regime. Among historians of Italian universities, this has produced new interest in Fascist purge mechanisms, in the nationalizing measures imposed on borderland universities such as Trieste, and in the impact of Italian racial theory and legislation. Seen alongside those of other twentieth-century dictatorships, the university policies of Mussolini's regime share a desire to permanently alter the landscape of university life in accordance with a precise political aim. Excluding undesirables, altering curricula, and eroding university autonomy all aimed at making the university a model site for the operation of state tactics of intimidation and surveillance and for the politicization of everyday life. And as under many other regimes, the results included an eventual provincialization of intellectual and academic life, an increased reliance on familial and extramural networks for intellectual and moral sustenance, and a pervasive conformism on the part of both students and docents that suited the dictatorship's political goals but worked against its need to create quality leadership. Italian Fascist university policies did differ from those of other regimes, however, on one important point: whereas Soviet and Eastern European Communist bloc regimes used universities as avenues to promote their goals of social mobility, facilitating the education of workers and peasants, Fascist university policies aimed to forestall any social emancipation. In this they were consistent with the core ethos of Mussolini's regime, which billed itself as a "third way" to modernity that would permit economic and technological progress without disturbing social or national identities.

While the promise of a distinctively Fascist vision of modernity that accommodated both revolutionary aspirations and social conservatism fueled much of the support university students, professors, and functionaries gave to the regime, a variety of factors tempered and complicated the "renewal" of the Italian university along the lines of Fascist ideology. At the institutional level, political factionalism and the strength of local loyalties and cliental traditions during the dictatorship meant that Fascist education reforms were often implemented unevenly. The continued presence of antifascist professors (who had taken the mandatory 1931 loyalty oath imposed on docents out of economic need or to provide a counter-influence to Fascism) also checked the politicization of the classroom. The exposure to new ideas and foreign culture offered by universities also vitiated the provincialization that came with Fascist policies of cultural autarchic. Foreign students (including Jewish exiles from Nazi Germany) were numerous at Italian universities until the end of the 1930s, and exchange agreements allowed Italian students to study abroad, although after 1936 this mostly meant travel to Axis-friendly countries. Finally, the absence of a formal political selection of students meant that antifascists and Fascists studied together, although the presence of informers (including those from the student ranks) and the psychological inhibitions that came from years of living in a police state worked to inhibit expressions of dissent.

Yet such factors, while important, must not be overrated. As a recent study of the Fascist University Groups (hereafter GUFs) argues, the triumph of a culture of catechetical reiteration over two decades of Mussolini's rule meant that few university students possessed the critical faculties necessary to resist Fascism's "ideological and aesthetic seductions." This climate of

2. See, on the purges, H. Goetz, Der freie Geist und seine Widersacher (Frankfurt am Main: Haag-Herchen Verlag, 1993); G. Boatti, Prefetti di no: Le storie dei dodici prefetti che si opposero a Mussolini (Turin: Einaudi, 2011); and Domenico Minniti and Stefano Areti, eds., La cattedra negata: Dal giuramento di fedeltà al fascismo alle leggi razziali nell'Università di Bologna (Bologna: CLUEB, 2002). On the impact of the racial laws, see Roberto Finzi, L'Università italiana e le legge antebraiche (Rimini, 1997), and Giorgio Israel and Piero Nasta, Scienza e razza nell'Italia fascista (Bologna: Mulino, 1998). On border region universities, see Anna Maria Vinci, Storia dell'Università di Trieste (Trieste: Università degli studi di Trieste, 1997).
4. There is a copious literature on antifascist mentors: on those at the University of Padua, see Angelo Venturi, ed., L'Università dalle leggi razziali alla Resistenza (Padova: Cleup, 1996). For others, see Franco Cambi, Anti-fascismo e pedagogia, 1926-1945 (Florence: Vallecchi, 1980), and the recollections of former students in Ettore Albertoni et al., eds., Generazioni degli anni difficili (Bari: Laterza, 1962).
conformism extended to professors, few of whom protested changes in university policies, even those caused by the application of racial legislation. While Italian universities remained strongholds of traditional humanistic culture (which was in any case appropriated by Fascist supporters who wished to capitalize on Italy’s prestigious cultural patrimony), they also served as important sites for the elaboration and divulgation of the most extremist and “revolutionary” developments within Fascism, from corporativism to racism to the New European order envisioned by the Axis.

The 1923 Gentile Reform and Transition from Liberalism to Fascism

Although the university policies of Mussolini’s dictatorship clearly broke with those of the liberal era, they also represent one period in a larger continuum of governmental education interventions since the nineteenth century that had addressed the following ongoing issues: centralization versus autonomy, the university’s role in professional formation, the place of Catholic education within the state, and the “intellectual unemployment” (disoccupazione intellettuale) caused by an oversupply of university graduates.7 Indeed, when the Fascists took power in 1922, the Italian university system was still regulated by the 1859 Casati law, which emphasized administrative centralization and the separation of humanistic and technical education. It limited the circulation of academic power (professors were appointed by the king for life) while providing the nascent Italian state with a steady flow of uniformly trained administrators. The beginnings of industrialization in the late nineteenth century brought little change to university policies, but much debate about the inadequacies of the existing system to cope with the demands of professional formation, especially in technical and scientific fields, and about

the need to adjust university enrollments to ease problems of postgraduate unemployment.8 Economic crisis and advent of mass politics following World War I (Catholic and socialist parties grew exponentially) only exacerbated the pressures on an education model that reflected the elitist and staunchly lay principles of nineteenth-century liberalism. The number of Italians receiving university degrees more than doubled between 1913 and 1923, creating problems of economic survival and a loss of status for those trained in the classic humanist tradition. The sense of crisis was palpable at the Ministry of Public Instruction, whose top post was occupied by five different men between 1919 and 1922. As one observer complained in 1921, the plethora of graduates had not only “devalued academic titles” but created the sad specter of men in their twenties and thirties “still living off of their families, disappointed by life before they have even lived it.”9 For this cohort, the failure of the university to fulfill its traditional function as a guarantor of stable employment and social promotion symbolized the larger bankruptcy of liberal institutions. They thus gravitated in large numbers to the new Fascist Party, which received 13 percent of its votes in 1921 from secondary and university students. This last group included many demobilized young officers, who in 1919 had protested in vain to the liberal government for subsidies so that they could complete their university degrees.10

Mussolini appealed to these young Italians as a revolutionary who vowed to eliminate bourgeois decadence and the sloth of parliamentary democracy. Yet he also simultaneously promised to protect social hierarchies in the face of Communist and socialist programs of radical change. These contradictory elements within Fascist ideology, which persisted throughout the life of the regime, found expression in the university sphere.

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9. Federico Mastroi, “Impiegoeconomia e Universitarismo,” Il Tempo, 18 September 1921. On this issue, see Barbargli, Disoccupazione intellettuale, 170, from which these figures are drawn. In Turin, for example, graduates increased 1923–1923 from 628 to 1020, a figure that also gives a sense of the small size of the university student population in Italy. Bruno Bongiovanni and Fabio Lezi, L’università di Torino durante il fascismo (Turin: G. Giappichelli, 1976), 15.
10. La Rovere, Storia dei GUF, 18. For student participation in early fascism, see Giustella, Autonomia e nazionalizzazione, 245–50; and Paolo Nello, L’avanguardismo studentesco alla origini del fascismo (Rome: Laterza, 1978).
Agendas of continuity prevailed at the institutional level—notably in the 1923 Gentile reform, which came less than one year after Mussolini took power—even as squadrist violence and radical populism characterized the culture of official Fascist student organizations. Indeed, in many respects the Gentile reform resembled the education reforms proposed in those years by liberals such as the philosopher Benedetto Croce (who served as minister of public instruction from June 1920 to July 1921). Responding to the problem of the overproduction of university graduates, Croce planned to limit access to university education by channeling all but the brightest students away from the prerequisite liceo classico (the high school that remained a legacy of the Napoleonic years). Like Croce, Gentile wished to realize a model of a highly “aristocratic” university, frequented by students who had passed through tough mechanisms of selection, rather than adapt the institution to the democratic and technological imperatives of mass society. Yet the Gentile reform far surpassed Croce’s plan in its rigidity and elitism and may be seen as the first of many long-term state projects by which the Fascists aimed to forestall mass social emancipation. As the historian Bruno Bongiovanni has observed, the reform intended to “block any spontaneous social mobility from above by intervening in the area of education, which was essential in a country that had traditionally lacked any alternative channels for social advancement.” As a creation of the transition period between democracy and dictatorship, it may be seen as the complement of the compromises the Duce made with industrialists and other interest groups that resulted in old elites retaining many privileges during the Fascist period in the private sector and in public administration. The church must be included among these interest groups, and the Gentile reform’s restoration of religious education in the schools (which the liberal Croce had vehemently opposed) signaled a spirit of pragmatic cooperation that would lead six years later to the signing of the Lateran Accords.

At both the institutional and curricular levels, the Gentile reform expressed Fascist concerns about elite formation and the preservation of social hierarchies. It inaugurated a three-tier system of classification that gave some campuses greater autonomy and downgraded others. Royal universities were entirely state funded; royal superior institutes, which trained for specific professions, received a combination of state and private funding; “free universities” were financially independent but subject to state intervention in all other areas. To further distinguish between universities and institutes for professional formation, Gentile created university-level schools to train Italians in technical and scientific disciplines such as pharmacology, architecture, and engineering, and added university-level teacher education faculties (the facoltà di Magisterio). Gentile’s depersonalization of the university and his devaluation of scientific and technical disciplines was also reflected in the demotion of medical and scientific faculties to a rank below those of letters and philosophy.

The depersonalization of the universities also allowed the Fascists to find their own solution to the ongoing dilemma of how to address concerns about the overproduction of graduates while meeting the increased demand for higher education. Under the Gentile legislation, students were forced to decide in adolescence whether to pursue professional training or the liceo classico—the only secondary school that allowed students to choose from a full range of faculties for their university education. The way that the issues of democratization and overproduction of graduates were used as foils against each another can be seen by Gentile’s solution to the “problem” posed by the large numbers of Italian women who wished to obtain postsecondary education: the state encouraged them early on to attend the newly instituted liceo femminile, which did not allow access to university education. Most women who made it to the university level were channeled to the teacher-training facoltà di magisterio. Enrollments in this faculty counted for a good part of the increased female presence within the university during Fascism (from 6 percent in 1914 to 20 percent in 1938), although a surge in female matriculations in all faculties starting in the late 1930s and increasing further

during the war further raised anxieties about job market competition and female emancipation.\textsuperscript{15}

Gentile's pedagogical thought devolved from his conception of the state as an “ethical” entity that embodied the universality of will. Self-realization, in this scheme, was achieved by a merging of the individual with the state, and civil conscience could only be formed by an internalization of the state's ethical precepts. This attribution of a moral and spiritual value to the state had obvious implications for scholastic policy, which was seen by Gentile as a central part of an organic project of national moral and cultural reform. In appointing the philosopher as minister of public instruction in October 1922—the same month as the March on Rome—Mussolini wished to bolster the regime's intellectual integrity, even as he signaled his intent to act in a “totalitarian” manner, to use a word that Gentile appropriated from the antifascist opposition and popularized through his many activities as philosopher, public intellectual, senator, and cultural organizer.\textsuperscript{16} Indeed, the Gentile reform asserted the state's right to interfere in internal academic affairs. Rectors and deans, as well as the members of the National Superior Council of Public Instruction, were now nominated by the king rather than elected by full professors, and professors' general assemblies were abolished. Gentile improved faculty salaries, but he also restricted their outside earnings, instituted professorial residence requirements, and gave the Ministry of Public Instruction more control over the jury and candidate pools for university chair competitions (concorsi di cattedra).\textsuperscript{17}

Not surprisingly, controversy greeted the Gentile reform from the moment it appeared. Although Croce and other prominent conservatives from the worlds of philosophy and pedagogy supported it, as did Catholics who praised the restoration of religious education in the schools, its attacks on academic freedom and its elitism drew criticism from the by-then beleaguered liberal and leftist press. Nor did protests lack from the universities: the rector of the University of Rome denounced the state's interference in internal academic matters as a departure from Italian university tradition, and students at the University of Turin and elsewhere protested the higher fees medical and engineering students now had to pay. Gentile was loudly booed when he spoke at the University of Turin in May 1924.\textsuperscript{18} These initial criticisms were partly addressed by the “corrections” (ritocchi) made by Gentile's successors, but a general feeling remained that the reform's self-reflexive vision of culture and its devaluation of technical and scientific knowledge made it ill-adapted to the social and economic realities of interwar Italian society. Gentile's education packet may have been "the most fascist reform," as Mussolini claimed, but it hardly reflected the priorities of a "revolutionary" regime that promised to make Italy a modern power.\textsuperscript{19}

Making Fascists: Universities, Intellectuals, and the "Regime of Youth"

Gentile left the post of minister of public instruction in July 1924, at a time of crisis and transition for the Fascists that would have far-reaching effects on Italian institutions and culture. One month earlier, the Fascists had kidnapped the popular socialist deputy Giacomo Matteotti, who had been an outspoken opponent of the regime. The discovery of his body in August of that year set off a crisis for the blackshirts that found its "resolution" in Mussolini's January 1925 declaration of dictatorship. Over the next several years, a series of laws transformed Italy into a police state with extensive powers of surveillance and detention. A series of purges of the Fascist National Party (Partito Nazionale Fascista, or PNF) sought to domesticate the party and make it subordinate to the demands of the state; and the process of disciplining and socializing students began with the creation of youth organizations.

The political crackdown drastically altered student life, which had remained pluralist through the presence of many non- and antifascist


\textsuperscript{16} On Gentile's university reform in the context of his overall pedagogical and philosophical ideas, see Antimo Negri, Giovanni Gentile educatore: Scuola di Stato e autonomie scolastiche (Rome: Armando, 1946), which takes an apologist tone at times, and Piergiovanni Genovesi, La riforma Gentile tra educazione e politica (Ferrara: Conso, 1976).

\textsuperscript{17} Ostenc, L'education en Italie, 76.

\textsuperscript{18} For reactions to the Gentile reform, see Koon, Believe, obey, fight, 55-59; Bongiovanni and Levi, L'Università di Torino, 3-49; and Ostenc, L'education en Italie, 556-60.

\textsuperscript{19} Of Gentile's immediate successors, Alessandro Cazati (July 1924-July 1925), Pietro Fedele (1925-26), and Giuseppe Belluzzo (1926-29), only Belluzzo, who was an engineer, instituted technical education in the secondary schools.
student organizations. These were now dissolved, to the benefit of the
GUFs, which now had a virtual monopoly on student life. Only the Uni-
viversity Federation of Italian Catholics (FUCI) survived, in part because
of its willingness to collaborate with the GUFs on Fascist anti-Masonic
campaigns. The institutionalization of Fascist violence that was the
last result of the Matteotti affair legitimated the consolidation of a climate of "defamation and intimidation" on university campuses, where
militants gave often violent lessons in "squadrismo" that complemented
the more traditional learning offered inside the lecture hall. Yet the
GUFs never had the political role that official student organizations enjoyed in
the early years of regimes such as Nazi Germany and Communist
Czechoslovakia; rather, they were soon placed under the direct control of
the PNF secretariat, depriving them of any autonomy.

While the political crackdown of the mid- and late 1920s led to no
immediate purges among the professorial ranks, the threat of physical
violence escalated for known antifascists, and all academics were subject
to solicitations from Gentile and other functionaries who were attempting
to foster the development of a recognizably "Fascist" culture. The first of
these requests came in 1925 when Gentile, as the head of the newly created
National Institute of Fascist Culture, asked for signatures for a "Mani-
foesto of Fascist Intellectuals" to be published in leading newspapers.
Croce quickly produced a counter-manifesto, it too destined for the press,
which presented antifascist academics with a quandry: should one speak
out and risk being silenced? Or should one stay silent and stay at one's
post to avoid leaving the field open for a Fascist colonization of culture
and youth?

Such dilemmas of conscience would become common in the years to
come, as the government acted to "fascistizzare" Italian universities and
purge all those who were not willing to serve the dictatorship. In 1925 the
Fascist-dominated parliament passed a law allowing the regime to dismiss
state employees who "do not give a full guarantee that they will faithfully
carry out their duties or who place themselves in a situation of incompat-

20. La Rovere, Storia dei GUF, 111. On the FUCI and its relationship with the various
organizations of the regime, see Richard J. Wolff, Between Pope and Duce: Catholic Students
in Fascist Italy (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), and Renato Moro, La formazione della classe

21. La Rovere, Storia dei GUF, 97. On the initial fascist university youth movements and
their changing relationship with the PNF and the general university climate in the early period
of Fascist rule, see La Rovere, Storia dei GUF, 147-149.


23. Signori, "L'università in uniforme," 200. On the creation of syndicates for intellectuals,
see Marla Stone, The Patron State. Culture and Politics in Fascist Italy (Princeton: Princeton
University Press, 1986); Philip Cannistraro, La fabbrica del concorso (Reni: Laterza, 1975); and
Ruth Ben-Ghiat, Fascist Modernity. Italy, 1922-45 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of
who, the mefue joke went, had joined the PNF "for family reasons" ("per necessità famigliare") rather than faith. Rectors and deans also came under scrutiny. The Fascist Grand Council ruled that they had to be PNF members for at least five years at time of appointment and ordered them to make black shirts part of their daily uniform.24

By the end of the first decade of Fascist rule, the regime had thus effectively instituted its own mechanisms of selection based on politics as well as professional preparation. But the issue of purging the existing teaching corps remained open. Neither the Gentile reform nor subsequent legislation had mandated the removal of recalcitrant faculty, since the Fascists been wary of alienating the intellectual class and bourgeois opinion as they consolidated their power. By the early 1930s, though, as Fascism expanded into a mass regime, culture took on a heightened importance as an agent of collective indoctrination at home and of image rehabilitation abroad. In this scheme, academics would act as scholars whose research would bring Italy prestige and as divulgators who would bridge the gap between high and popular knowledge and form a new generation of fascitized Italians.

The recasting of academic culture in a totalitarian light gave new urgency to the task of removing antifascist professors. In 1931, all university professors were asked to sign a loyalty oath that read:

I swear to be loyal to the king, to his royal successors, and to the Fascist regime, to faithfully observe the statute and other state laws, to exercise the office of teacher and to carry out all my academic duties with the aim of forming productive, upstanding citizens who are devoted to the Patria and to the Fascist regime. I swear that I do not belong nor will I belong to any associations or parties those activities are not compatible with the duties of my position.25

Whether out of fear of reprisals, passivity, Fascist fervor, or economic need, the vast majority of academics signed. Just 12 out of 1,250 refused, out of conscience, antifascist politics, or other considerations (such as independent wealth or being close to retirement). Among these were Ruffini, the Turin law professor, who took early retirement, the art historian Lionello Venturi, the University of Bologna surgeon Bortolo Negrisoli, who was severely beaten by Fascist thugs for his action, and the literary critic and writer Giuseppe Borgese, a professor of aesthetics at the University of Milan who at the time of the oath had a visiting appointment at the University of California. Borgese resigned from his Italian position and became a permanent exile in America, teaching first at Smith College and then at the University of Chicago. In his 1977 denunciation of the dictatorship, Goliath: The March of Fascism, Borgese scathingly declared that the oath changed the behavior of Italian intellectuals, even those who had previously held themselves aloof from the regime: "Many of them rationalized the oath and became interested in the permanent triumph of fascism, seeking in it the justification of their behavior."26

Drawing on this, I would argue that the oath's long-term impact lay in its performative dimension: its content was certainly important, since it committed the signer to direct his or her teaching toward a precise political goal, but so was the ritual of signing before one's rector, with two witnesses in tow. If the blackshirt-clad rector stood in for the state in this symbolic transaction, the witnesses (testimoni) represented the eyes and ears of the signer's peers. Such occasions bound academics together by creating a sense of collective complicity about their voluntary subjugation to the dictatorship.27

For the numbers of academics who believed in Fascism, such controls were a small price to pay for the transformation of Italian learning. As in most other dictatorships, purges went hand in hand with promotions for those who were specialists in areas of knowledge that had political utility (such as demography, political economy, colonialism, and anything to do with antiquity). These individuals enjoyed myriad career opportunities as the government started new institutes and journals and sponsored studies, research missions, and public works. New fields of knowledge also appeared, the most important in this period being corporatism, the regime's much-vaunted plan for reorganizing the economy. Largely due to the efforts of Giuseppe Bottai, who served as minister of corporations

25. Koon, Belove, Obey, Fight, 66–67. See also Goetze, Der freie Geist und seine Widersacher, and Mirri and Arieti, La cattedra negata.
27. See Ben-Chif, Fascist Modernities, esp. chap. 1, for an analysis of the place of these rituals within fascist culture.
from 1928 to 1932 and minister of national education after 1936, corporativist studies came to constitute a sort of subculture within the academy, with its own university chairs, journals, book series, and under- and postgraduate degree offerings. Labor and legal scholars, economists, and political scientists were among those who contributed most to and benefited most from these innovations. Political science also gained autonomy and status during Fascism. In 1927 the University of Perugia inaugurated the first faculty of political science in Italy, and other universities quickly followed suit, offering courses that included the history and doctrine of Fascism and, in the 1930s, comparative studies on European fascism. This allocation of resources reflected official perceptions that political science, like corporativism, would attract the most politicized students and teachers and act as an ideological stronghold within the university. In fact, case studies of the universities of Turin, Trieste, and Pavia bear this supposition out; the senior theses (tesi di laurea, required for graduation) from these faculties tended to follow the flow of Fascism’s ideological and diplomatic positions, as for that matter did professors’ course topics.28 Certainly, alterations to the curriculum were far from uniform. Local traditions continued to matter, as did the personality and politics of individual rectors, whose decisions about the use of campus resources (for university and external events) also set the tone of academic life.29

To effect these institutional and cultural changes, the regime used a combination of legislation and coercion to gain the compliance of university faculty. These instruments proved less efficacious, though, with regard to the final goal of official education reform: to socialize university students as Fascists and train them to serve as the regime’s future leaders. The question of forming a new elite had preoccupied officials since the start of the regime, and the Fascist cult of youth had been an effective drawing point for the university students who were its earliest and most fervent supporters. Generational thinking formed an important characteristic of all European rightist movements, but the construct of youth was even more central for the Italian Fascist ideological identity, though, since the blackshirts lacked mobilizing myths such as class struggle or (before 1938) race, which were so effectively utilized by the Communists and National Socialists respectively. Inside Italy, youth and education policies worked together to reinforce restrictions on opportunities for social mobility. The structure of official youth groups makes this point clearly: postsecondary school males were channeled into two distinct groups—the fasci giovani di combattimento, for lower-class Italians who would not continue their education, and the gups, who as the future managerial class enjoyed special freedoms and privileges.30

In the early 1930s, paralleling the intensification of discussions about the need for a uniquely Fascist culture, the issue of elite formation occupied increasing space in the press. Mussolini had already proclaimed Fascism to be a “regime of youth,” and now officials and ideologues simultaneously aired blueprints for political socialization and worried that the tepid political fervor of most university professors would limit their implementation. The sociologist Camillo Pellizzi warned that the gap between Fascism’s inflammatory rhetoric and repressive reality had already begun to alienate the brightest members of the new generation.

“One cannot serve the cause of revolution and reaction at the same time,” he intoned in a 1932 article that perhaps necessarily remained without answer.31 In fact, although students had provided key support for early Fascism, the generation now coming of age, those born roughly between 1905 and 1915, seemed to be more critical and disaffected. Too young to have experienced World War I or the March on Rome, many of these students felt a kind of status anxiety in a regime that made combat experience a measure of character and political faith. Excluded from Fascism’s past, they claimed a starring role in the fashioning of Fascism’s future, only to find themselves cast as servants, or, in the words of one young art critic, as “those who look on . . . as those who, for good or ill, merely obey.”32


29. At the University of Turin, the installation of an enthusiastically fascist rector Silvio Pivano in 1928 accelerated politicization. Pivano added courses on corporativist law and other “fascist” subjects and offered to host a “school of corporativist culture” for syndical leaders. Bongiovanni and Levi, L’Università di Torino, 65.


Judging from police reports and youth journals, this sense of failed expectations became more widespread at Italian universities in the early 1930s. Informers related that in Turin, Rome, Naples, and other cities “antagonism, diffidence, and demoralization” reigned among university students, who were disappointed at the disjunction between the regime’s youth-promoting propaganda and the limitations imposed by political controls and a depression-era job market. “This regime, which claims it wants to valorize youth, is actually trying to clip their wings and protect the old guard,” reported one Neapolitan spy in summing up their feelings. Independent youth journals run by university students confirm these sentiments, as do the reviews of local GUF organizations. The reviews Saggiatore and Orpheus, run by philosophy students at the Universities of Rome and Milan, respectively, stand out in the first category. Both enthusiastically Fascist publications blamed the hegemony of “old men and old ideas” for the slow pace of change in Italy, and Gentile was a favorite target. Both reviews lambasted Idealism for its preoccupation with obsolete “metaphysical concerns” and championed doctrines that would reflect the “anti-ideological” nature of Fascism—namely, pragmatism and phenomenology. Saggiatore also advocated the inclusion of science in school curricula, whereas the more modernist-inflected Orpheus, which had many female contributors, complained of gender discrimination in the universities and the lack of sex education in the lower schools. Attacks on the education establishment also came from the more independent-minded reviews of the GUF. In Vent’anni, the journal of the University of Turin GUF, Alberto Bairati complained that the Gentile reform had allowed liberalism’s “decrepid and moldy atmosphere” to continue well into the dictatorship. He argued for a renewal of the professorial ranks through earlier retirements and the promotion of younger scholars who shared his generation’s worldview.

The regime responded to this situation of collective disaffection with a new set of policies meant to convince university students that Fascism was going to “make way for youth” (far largo ai giovani). These measures favored Italians under thirty for civil service posts (including in academia), spawned new postgraduate professional schools to stave off intellectual unemployment, afforded students more freedom of discussion, and established patronage programs for young intellectuals. For most university students, this new largesse was experienced most directly through the GUFs, which underwent a massive expansion of their programs and resources in the 1930s. GUF chapters appeared in every Italian university town, and membership was extended to students of military academies, who, like university students, could participate in GUF activities even after graduation, up to age twenty-eight. GUF budgets increased almost tenfold between 1930 and 1937, and sevenfold more between 1937 and 1943. By 1941, funding for GUF activities amounted to 54 percent of the budget of PNF youth programs. This enormous figure communicates the importance the party gave them as a means of training a new elite.

Like the Sindacato Español Universitario (SEU) of Franco’s Spain, for which they served as a model, the GUFs engaged university students in many ways, and it is no exaggeration to say that most of postwar Italy’s political and cultural elite participated in their activities, even though membership was voluntary until 1939. As was the case in Spain and in Nazi Germany, students became active for pragmatic as well as political reasons. The GUFs offered low-cost meals and medical care, as well as the use of an on-campus Student House (Casa dello Studente) with lodging and recreational spaces. The GUFs were also essential cultural resources: they gave young men and women access to cultural events and fields of endeavor that might have normally been closed to them, and public

33. Quotations from 30 May 1931, report from Turin, in Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACs), Ministero dell’Interno (MI), Divisione Generale Pubblica Sicurezza (DGPS), Affari Generali e Riservati (AGR) (1927–33), Cat. C2, b.1; and 30 April 1931, report from Naples, in ACs, MI, Divisione Polizia Politica (DPP), Affari per materia, pacco 149, ff. 21–24, NU (1932–33). This last file also contains reports from Parma, Modena, Milan, and Bologna, and the original order from the Fascist police chief, who asked informers to find out “what [university] students are doing and if bad feelings are brewing.”

34. Quotations from Mario Pannunzio, “Contributo all’inchiesta sulla nuova cultura,” Saggiatore, August–October 1933. On these independent youth journals and their attacks against idealism, see Ben-Ohit, Fascist Modernities, chap. 4, and Mario Setchi, Il mito della nuova cultura (Manduria: Lecce, 1984).


37. GUF enrollments rose from 55,000 in 1933 to 75,000 in 1936 and reached 164,000 by end of the regime. Figures from Koon, Believe, Obey, Fight, 150.
recognition to those with talent. The CUF's Experimental Theatre companies, many of which went on tour, attracted budding actors and directors, and the "Cineguf" cinema groups, of which fifty-four existed by 1939, allowed Italians to learn 16mm film production. With government permission, the Cineguf also sponsored film series of uncensored, undubbed movies; Pier Paolo Pasolini was among those who attended the Bologna CUF's showings of foreign films. Finally, dozens of CUF journals offered writers, journalists, cartoonists, and photographers hands-on experience. "I took advantage of the CUF to change my status in life, to pass from a simple office worker to the creative and independent work of the intellectual," recalled the journalist Antonio Ghirelli, who got his start writing for his local CUF journal during the war. 38

In this panorama of CUF activities the Littorialia della cultura e dell'arte competitions merit particular attention. The relaxed censorship, special mentoring, and other privileges afforded to university youth were all operative in these events, which gave students national exposure for their intellectual and creative abilities. Designed to stimulate competition among the very best youth and bring them to the attention of Fascist officials, the Littorialia consisted of debates on written and oral presentations in areas that ranged from film criticism to racial doctrine. Topics changed each year, making the Littorialia a yardstick of the changing priorities of the regime from the first competition in 1934 to the last meeting in 1940. Female students had their own Littorialia, which were held from 1939 to 1941. While the press gave much more attention to the male competitions, winners of both sexes received money, a gold M, and a chance to meet Mussolini and jurors such as Ossitino Respighi and Giuseppe Ungaretti. As a mechanism for identifying future leaders, the Littorialia functioned rather efficiently: the list of winners includes the designer Ettore Sottsass, the politicians Mario Alicata and Aldo Moro, and the director Giuseppe De Santis. 39 By the end of the 1930s, the competitions had a reputation for tolerating nonconformist thinking and behavior, both of the type that Fascist officials had probably anticipated (irreverent pranks, riotous discussions) and of the type that they had not (booing officials, open criticism of foreign policy decisions such as the alliance with Hitler). Indeed, the Littorialia have been remembered as an important step on the "long voyage" that took young Italians from Fascism to antifascism. Antifascists did come to the Littorialia in search of converts: the University of Padova student Eugenio Curiel covered the competitions simultaneously for the Padova CUF review Il Bò and the Italian Communist Party exile paper Lo stato operario. It is more accurate, however, to say that for most participants the Littorialia, like other CUF activities, functioned as a space of education about the range of opinions their peers held about Fascism rather than as any catalyst to active dissent. 40

Italian Universities Between Empire and War

In 1935–36, Italy invaded and conquered Ethiopia, setting in motion a chain of events that brought Italy into an alliance with Nazi Germany and ultimately into World War II. Domestically, the declaration of empire produced paroxysms of patriotic rhetoric and fueled protectionist and autarchic measures that had an impact on Italian cultural and university life. Most immediately, it strengthened the hand of those in and out of government who believed that Italy's future as a leader of the militant Europe required a total fascistization of the school. The pedagogue Luigi Volpicelli argued that Italian schools needed "four or five years of really tough dictatorship" to effect change at the human as well as institutional level. The students of Vent'anni echoed this sentiment in terms that convey the militarized climate that took hold in the universities: "The Gentile reform is outdated . . . because it has as its goal the free spiritual, moral, cultural and civic formation of youth . . . but today the common

39. Marina Addi Saba and Ugolino Alfassio Grimaldi, Cultura a passo romano (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1983), give a complete chronicle of each Littorialia with themes and winners.
40. On the Littorialia as an antifascist recruitsite, see Ruggero Zangrandi, Il lungo viaggio attraverso il fascismo: Contributo alla storia di una generazione (Turin: Einaudi, 1948); Ettore Albertoni et al., eds., La generazione degli anni difficili (Bari: Laterza, 1963); Alessandro Bonanni, "La cultura degli anni trenta: Dai Littorialia all'antifascismo," Terzo programma 4 (1963): 183–210; and Paolo Altieri, "Cultura e politica: Gli studenti romani dal 1936 al 1944," Incontri meridionali 3:4 (1975): 7–17. These works, which are authored by or include interviews with men who had grown up under the regime, tend to exaggerate the degree of antifascist feeling among university youth. La Rovere, Storia dei CUF, provides a corrective to such views. On the CUF journal Il Bò and Curiel's uncover operations, see Ivano Paccagnella, "Stampa di fronte: 'Il Bò' tra Cuf e Curiel," in Credere, obbedire, combattere: Il regime linguistico nel Ventennio, ed. F. Foresti (Bologna: Pendragon, 2003), 125–54.
denominator of all scholastic policy must be the task of forming the Fascist citizen-soldier . . . the school must not be afraid of forcing, with a violently educative intervention if necessary, the individual formation of every single youth." Indeed, after 1935, war provided a new context for Fascist social engineering projects. It was no longer enough for the regime to create Italians who could "believe, obey, and fight"; now they must prepare to conquer and rule. Over the next several years, Mussolini undertook a "reform of custom" in Italy that imposed the goose-step and other practices designed to inculcate a command mentality. Within this scheme, university students would serve as a new class of colonial experts, from administrators to specialists in tropical medicine, and as the creators and propagators of a new Fascist imperial culture to be diffused throughout the world.

Without a doubt, the conquest of Ethiopia marked the height of popular and intellectual enthusiasm for the regime. For students, the war offered a chance to finally translate their political faith into concrete action. So many university students volunteered for combat that Mussolini had to authorize additional "Universitarian Battalions," and special honors were accorded to those who fell on the battlefield. The University of Pavia gave honorary degrees to students who were killed in action, and commemorated them with marble plalcs in its "courtyard of the martyrs." The climate of excitement spurred political activism, and the guys surged in popularity at this time: enrollments at the University of Trieste chapter doubled between 1936 and 1937.

The appointment in 1935 of Cesare Maria De Vecchi as the new minister of national education suggests that Mussolini, too, was ready to embrace a harder pedagogical line. De Vecchi was in many ways an unlikely education bureaucrat; although his Catholic and monarchist sentiments placed him on good terms with Italian conservatives, his shaved head and mustache bespoke a past history of head-busting. Inaugurating a course on Fascist culture two years earlier, he had referred to himself as "mountain warrior," and he now declared war on the "individualistic and
decentralized spirit" that still reigned in the schools thanks to the Gentile reform. The universities were his particular target, and he used his brief tenure to eliminate much institutional and academic autonomy by arrogating responsibility for professorial hires and transfers (which gave the government the power to threaten academics with transfers to remote areas); by requiring academic institutes to be affiliated with the nearest university, and above all by establishing set curricula for each course of study. Although professors could petition to deviate from this norm, few exceptions were granted. Border region universities were hardest hit by this centralizing measure, as were universities with strong specialized programs that attracted students from throughout the country. At the University of Trieste, central European languages were downgraded to electives in a move that asserted the nationalizing agendas of the state.

De Vecchi's emphasis on centralization and uniformity mirrored contemporary trends within cultural policy and party structures. Yet his anti-intellectual bent and rude manner evoked the squadrist heritage that the Fascists wished to bury, especially at a time when Italy was the target of foreign observations and League of Nations sanctions for invading Ethiopia. Thus in late 1936 Bottai took over the post of minister of national education, where he would remain until he helped to remove Mussolini from office in July 1943.

Bottai's curriculum vitae made him well suited for the job. Although he was an ex-squadrist who had recently won medals for his volunteer service in Ethiopia at the age of forty, he was also the darling of the intelligentsia for his campaigns for a Fascist culture, his influential journal Critica fascista, and his position as the preeminent official patron of the intellectual class. He enjoyed a particular popularity among youth for championing all things modern: corporatism, some forms of artistic modernism, and later, anti-Semitism, which he understood as a salutary cure of degenerate influences on the national body. He presided over the expansion of the education establishment at a time when university enrollments had increased, and worked together with the Ministry of Popular Culture (mcp, established in 1937) to alleviate intellectual unemployment. The mcp also expanded to encompass five general directorates (press, propaganda, cinema, tourism, and theater), and assumed management of important cultural bodies such as the Society of Italian Authors and Editors.

42. On this nascent colonial culture and the shift in cultural climate after 1936, see Ben-Ghiat, Fascist Modernities, chap. 5.
44. On De Vecchi's tenure as minister of national education, see Koon, Believe, Obev, Fight, 68-70; Ricuperati, "Per una storia dell'università italiana," 340-43, from which the quotations are taken; and Vinci, Storia dell'Università di Trieste, 256.
These innovations were welcome news to the legions of under- and unemployed university graduates, many of whom found freelance or permanent work at the MCR. Under Bottai’s leadership, the Ministry of National Education also increased its staff and its connections with academics as it undertook ambitious efforts to protect Italy’s cultural patrimony, and to promote the work of living Italian artists through a law that set aside 2 percent of public works project budgets for public art.

Bottai’s activism and his totalizing and totalitarian worldview affected the Italian universities in three major ways: through the implementation of anti-Jewish laws in the schools, through initiatives that fostered Italian-German exchanges in line with the new Cultural Accord; and through the 1939 School Charter, which constituted the first thoroughgoing revision of the scholastic system since the Gentile reform. The question of why a country and a regime without a history of anti-Jewish violence adopted racial laws in 1938 is too complex to be fully addressed here. While the 1936 alliance with Nazi Germany clearly played a part, since Fascist anti-Semitic laws were modeled on the Nuremberg laws, racism also built on and responded to national issues and traditions. Aside from the contributions made by a history of Catholic anti-Judaism, anti-Semitic sentiments and legislation built on demographic measures that aimed to remodel the Italian population; articulated fears about threats to Italy’s autochthonous traditions at a time of rapid modernization; displaced onto the Jews older discourses about national groups (previously Southerners) who supposedly hindered the achievement of modernity and nationhood; and galvanized those who saw Fascism as a means of fighting bourgeois capitalism. It is to such concerns, rather than to any desire to “imitate” Nazi Germany, that we must look in order to explain the support given to the racial laws by intellectuals in and out of the academy. Indeed, racism became for some intellectuals a means of differentiating Fascist from National Socialist ideology, especially as worries about Italian subjugation within the Axis alliance set in.

The changing climate of Italian culture was in fact first felt in the schools and universities, since Fascist ideologues and policymakers had labeled education an area of pronounced Jewish influence. “Our universities are invaded by Jewish professors. Here we need a true clean cut,” wrote one polemicist on 4 August 1938. In fact, the cutting process had already begun; one day earlier, foreign Jewish students had been removed from all universities, followed by textbooks by Jewish authors.

The central role that Italian academics played in launching the racial campaign also made universities an immediate target. The July 1938 “Manifesto of Racial Scientists,” which had signaled the start of state anti-Semitism, was authored by men who all held full-time positions within the Italian university system. These same individuals also served as editors of the notorious periodical Difesa della razza, which had started as an antisemite-cum-skepticist journal during the colonial war and now extended its prohibitions to include Jews. It is no exaggeration to state that from 1938 to the end of the regime, anti-Semitism was a normal component of Italian Fascist culture and ideology and a routine category in the curriculum vitae of many Italian academics and intellectuals.

A “racial census” later that month prepared the way for more expulsions, which came in September with a decree that forbade Jews to teach or attend schools and universities (students currently matriculated were allowed to finish their degrees) and banned them from academies and cultural institutions. Commenting on these developments, the anti-fascist exile paper Giustizia e Libertà observed that recourse to purges of the

46. A good discussion of these projects is Alessandra Masi’s introduction to Giuseppe Bottai, La politica degli arti (Rome: Edit Italia, 1992).


50. See Giorgio Fabre, L’elenco: Cenni fascisti, editori e autori ebrei (Torino: Zanromani, 1938); and Brizzi, Silence and Remembering.

51. The manifesto’s authors were Guido Landri, research assistant at the Institute of Anthropology of the University of Rome and head of the Racial Studies Office at the Ministry of Popular Culture, as primary author; Lidio Cipriani, director of National Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence; Leone Franzoi, assistant in pediatric medicine at the University of Milan; Marcello Ricci, assistant in zoology at the University of Rome; and Lino Butinco, assistant in general pathology at the University of Rome, with input from Mussolini himself. Difesa della razza’s chief editor was Telesio Interlandi.
existing academy was a measure of the regime’s failure to realize a viable culture of its own after sixteen years of Fascist rule. The government and its supporters saw it differently. In October, the ministerial bulletin Vita universitaria expressed its “unconditional admiration” for a measure that would “liberate us from a treacherous people, rejuvenate the University, and purify the race.” A few weeks later the rector of the University of Palermo lauded the racial campaign and linked it to a larger attempt to discipline Italian universities, which had become through their own tolerance “a sort of asylum for the most undesirable people . . . Italians and foreigners, believers and unbelievers, faithful subjects and dangerous anarchists.”

The racial laws changed the composition of the Italian academy. A total of two hundred professors lost their positions, about 7-8 percent of the total national faculty. At the University of Trieste, for example, four of thirteen full professors, three of fifteen associates, and two of sixteen assistants left the academy. The laws came as a particular shock to Jewish academics of Fascist leanings, such as the corporativist expert Gino Arias and the statistician Pier Paolo Luzzatto Fegiz, a PNF member from 1923, who had that year given talks at the request of the MDP while on a state-funded research trip to America. Medical and science faculties were especially hit hard, and the expulsion of Jews from these fields, which were seen as Jewish strongholds, was seen as a particular cause for celebration. The rector of Pavia declared that the racial laws would allow Italian science to become Italian and recommended continued vigilance against the “Jewish and Masonic conceptions that still pollute our intellectual life”.

Among non-Jewish Italian academics, the racial laws inspired no overt opposition—only one intellectual, the writer Massimo Bontempelli, refused to occupy a forcibly vacated chair—but only “a tired and passive acceptance.” Rather, as in Nazi Germany, state anti-Jewish provisions offered professional opportunities for academics, who disseminated the new ideology in academic and popular publications, on the radio, and in public lectures funded by cultural institutions. Ultimately, the career advancement possibilities created by the posts vacated by Jews and the formation of new or additional chairs in disciplines such as demography, biology, and anthropology proved more convincing than any pangs of conscience. University students in this case took their cues from their teachers: the CUF became important centers of racial propaganda, and every CUF headquarters had an office of demography and race. Although informers encountered occasional “hostility to the Rome-Berlin Axis” on university campuses, and Italian students sometimes booed newscasts on Nazism, such sentiments reflected opposition to Hitler’s aggravizing tendencies in the wake of the Anschluss rather than to the Italian racial laws. The example of racism shows the extent to which Fascist ideology transformed the academy, despite the claims made by some that “autonomy of research” was respected and that neither racism nor other Fascist themes affected the substance of university life.

The 1938 Cultural Accord between Italy and Germany also affected Italian university life. As Jens Petersen has written, for both German and Italian intellectuals, the Axis “opened the doors to a flood of desires to make contact, plan visits, and project long-term studies and collaborations.” Education exchange agreements were just one aspect of a host of scientific, medical, legal, cultural, and youth group collaborations that began even before the formal signing of the accord in November 1938. The Cultural Accord offered each regime the potential of new markets and audiences for its intellectual and artistic production and the chance to communicate its own history and vision of Europe’s future. New university chairs and other teaching positions in German and Italian culture


53. Vinci, Storia dell’Università di Trieste, 209.


56. On the formation of a culture of racism, see Renzo De Felice, Storia degli ebrei sotto il fascismo (Turin: Einaudi, 1993), 379-404, and Ben-Ghiat, Fascist Modernities, 148-47.

57. Reports from Milan, 12 January, and from ten other cities, 7 April 1938; reports from 9 April, 8 May, and 31 May 1938, all in AGS, MI, UGPF, DFP, b.132, F.Ku. On changing youth attitudes in the late 1930s, see Ben-Ghiat, Fascist Modernities, 157-70; Koon, Believe, Obey, Fight, 277-86; and Zagaroli, “Giovani e apparii culturali.”


and literature appeared in both countries, Italian became an approved subject for state examinations in Germany, and innumerable conferences and exchanges brought together university students and academics in every field.

Pragmatism as well as ideology inspired these German-Italian intellectual collaborations. Hoping to advance their knowledge in medicine, biology, and the natural sciences, the Italians gave Germans access to their rich cultural patrimony. Job possibilities opened up in Germany for the underemployed Italian intellectual class, paralleling an Axis-produced flow of Italian manual laborers to Nazi factories; German art historians and classicists benefited from improved access to Italian sites and sources. These joint endeavors compensated for both regimes’ exclusions from League of Nations-sponsored cultural-exchange networks. With the imposition of League sanctions on Italy, for example, the Fascists were shut out of the International Committees on Popular Arts and Traditions and lost their leadership of the League-affiliated International Institute for Educational Cinematography. The Italian-German Cultural Accord was merely the first of a series of agreements among authoritarian powers (such as those struck separately by Italy and Germany with Spain and with Japan) designed to establish a counter-web of cultural relations that would further anticommunist and imperialist political agendas.

In 1939, in the midst of these developments in racial and cultural politics, Bottai unveiled his School Charter as a means of finally realizing a truly Fascist education system. In 1935, as he was being considered for his future post as minister of national education, Bottai had attacked the Gentile reform as having worsened the problem of intellectual unemployment and perpetuated bourgeois solipsism with its protection of humanistic studies for their own sake. Now, four years later, he had prepared his own reform designed to shift the emphasis within the school system from humanistic studies to fields associated with technology and labor. As Bottai argued in the 1939 Charter, the state was acting against its own interests in continuing to form a type of subject that could not meet its exigencies. “Although the country needs engineers, it makes lawyers . . . although it needs men in step with modern life, it remains guided by the ideas of a humanism that is outdated (and thus not humanistic) even though it continues to profess its Fascist faith.” Bottai wished instead to produce a new knowledge and labor base that could sustain Italian Fascist projects of modernization and conquest. To this end, he engineered a complete revision of the school system that integrated labor service into the school and university curricula (following the example of the National Socialist Arbeitsdienst) and discouraged students from taking the path of classical education. Bottai’s Charter otherwise affected universities only tangentially; liceo classico students no longer had the privilege of enrolling in any faculty they pleased, whereas choices expanded for graduates of the liceo scientifico. The Charter also attempted to discourage overall university attendance at a time when university enrollments were increasing by establishing a host of professional high-school level institutes to accelerate the production of trained technicians as Italy prepared for war.

Although Bottai felt he was giving Italy a school system that finally took into account the realities of contemporary existence, the Charter’s labor requirement caused much controversy and confusion among lower- and high-school teachers and parents. Lack of funds, the war, and obstructionism from these groups prevented it from ever being fully implemented. At the university level, too, Bottai clearly wished to engineer a radical shift in academic mentalities and culture. The expulsion of Jews from the system can be seen as a means to that end, even though the racial laws cost the Italians the most in fields of science, since distinguished physicists such as Enrico Fermi (whose wife was Jewish) emigrated. As a contribution toward this transformation, Bottai organized a 1944 debate on the topic “The Universities and Culture” in his review Primato that became a sort of referendum on the success of twenty years of Fascist cultural and education policies. University students, writing individually and as part of university journal collectives, gave the regime a failing vote. They observed that the academic establishment had never abandoned its liberal mindset, and placed the blame on a government that had been too respectful of democratic canons of academic freedom to force through changes befitting a dictatorial state. Even the loyalty oath had accomplished little in their


62. See Barbagli, Disonomizzazione intellettuali, 289–305, for a discussion of how Bottai’s charter aimed to solve job-market problems; also see Gentili, Giuseppe Bottai, 65–150, and Ricuperati, “Per una storia dell’università italiana,” 351–61.
estimation: "The Italian is much too shaped by the Catholic experience not to know intimately the tactic of the 'mental reservation,'" one young contributor concluded provocatively.  

At the other end of the spectrum lay the opinions of Gentile. The Idealist philosopher acknowledged the limitations of Fascist education reform, but concluded that the fault lay with those who had transformed his 1923 master plan beyond all recognition. Leveling a thinly veiled critique at Bottai's School Charter in particular, Gentile upheld the cause of limited academic autonomy and diagnosed the Italian university's ailment as a lack of liberty: "And I don't mean political liberty. That is a liberty quite difficult to define. It too is necessary; but impossible without the good will of individuals... I wish rather to speak of scientific, didactic liberty; that liberty proper to the life of the university and which subsists on thought. This [liberty] is always suffocated by laws and rules that are alien to its own nature: by uniform and rigid scholastic structures and by preestablished programs."  

Although Gentile's viewpoint reflected sentiments shared by many academics, by 1941 it seemed almost anachronistic as a statement of Fascist education policy. It bespoke a bourgeois sense of cultural propriety that was totally absent from the totalitarian mentalities evinced in the student contributions.  

Ultimately, it is to these students we must look to evaluate the consequences of Fascist education policies for Italian culture and the effects of twenty years of dictatorship on younger Italians. As in Nazi Germany, the political socialization of students was complicated by the impact of consumerism and mass culture on collective leisure practices and individual fantasies, as well as by unresolved contradictions between nationalism and internationalism, revolution and reaction, tradition and modernity. Yet the Italian regime's longevity meant that an entire generation of youth developed from birth through university with a very limited political reference point: Mussolini and Fascism. Indeed, to those who did not travel abroad and received no conflicting messages from family, mentors, or peers, all of Fascism's causes and campaigns might have appeared perfectly normal and natural. In the recollection of the director Renato Castellani, whose interest in filmmaking had been jump-started by participating in his GUF, "we were like canaries born in a cage with no idea of what existed outside... one lived in a world organized in a certain manner, and one went ahead agreeing more or less with what this world did." After the fall of Fascism, this generation became "a generation without a past": entire subjects that had occupied student energies for years (such as corporativism, colonialism, or racism) vanished from the universities in 1945, even as the professorial corps responsible for those areas of study remained intact. What was the afterlife of this suddenly discredited knowledge base, and what kind of intellectual unemployment did graduates in these fields face after 1945? Answering these questions can clarify the consequences of the changes wrought to Italian universities as institutions and as networks of social and cultural life by twenty years of engagement with Mussolini's regime.

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63. Pompeo Biondi, "Le università e la cultura," Primo, 1 April 1941; also Rivoluzione, "Le università e la cultura," ibid, and II Bo, "Le università e la cultura," Primo, 1 March 1941.

64. Giovanni Gentile, "Le università e la cultura," Primo, 15 May 1941.

