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Glover, Denis - *Repeat: A Warning from History*, Black Inc, 2024, (pp. 116) ISBN 9781743823781

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To say that the rise of the Donald, the 'Make America Great Again' ('MAGA') movement and its ostensible threat to conventional US and perhaps Western politics more generally, has provoked considerable journalistic commentary in the years since Donald Trump's surprise victory in the presidential election of 2016, would be an understatement. Dennis Glover's *Repeat: A Warning from History* offers a journalist's perspective on the similarities between the rise of the MAGA movement and other populist movements in the first half of the 20th century. However, rather than offering a rigorous comparative analysis of the reference movements and MAGA from 2016 and onwards, Glover's book is a kind of 'everyman's' polemic against the prospect of 'history repeating itself'. As he points out at the end under the title 'these nine words', 'if something can happen once, it can happen again (140).

The idea of history repeating itself is scarcely a new idea. Indeed, what may loosely be called 'the cyclical view of history' is at least as old as Polybius in *The Histories* who, roughly 2200 years ago, sketched a cycle that passed through a series of stages that ran from monarchy, through tyranny, aristocracy, oligarchy, democracy and mob rule before the 'anacyclosis' returned to monarchy. The common Western historiographic paradigm takes a more linear approach in which the present generations learn the lessons of history, presumably avoiding past errors and doing better. Being condemned by our failure to learn 'the lessons of history' in order to suffer the adverse fate of past generations has, at least in the last few hundred years, been a regular theme, with commentators such as Burke, Marx, Santayana, Hardy and Churchill each inflecting it in their own way. Glover's invocation presents no historiographic claims however but is an appeal to credulity arising from 'these nine words'.

Glover's proximal concern is the rise of Donald Trump and the broader threat that the emergence of populist movements adopting Trump's iteration of these pose to the integrity of contemporary governance. Channelling Churchill, Glover invites us to arm ourselves with its lessons, and dutifully takes his audience on a figurative day trip through the last 100 years or so of populism. In the course along the journey, he revisits the rises to power of Hitler, Stalin, Franco, Putin and Trump, exploring their methods, modalities of appeal and consequences. Throughout, as he points out, there were opportunities to stifle the challenges, but for a variety of reasons, the ruin of the middle classes, inapt policies on reparations and indemnities to parties losing a war, the fecklessness or venality of the conservative elites, US isolationism and so forth, populism had its way. Human catastrophes were the consequence in each of the cases prior to Trump, who as POTUS was ambivalent about the threat of COVID-19. Glover might have argued (though he didn't) that the surplus US deaths and long-term morbidity associated with the pandemic were Trump's catastrophe. He did, however, link Trump's January 6th, 2021, insurrection with Hitler's putative 'Beer Hall Putsch'. Glover concludes by bidding us to remember 'these nine words'. Clearly, there's no rebutting this logic. While each of Glover's examples is salient to his polemic in a broad sense, there is no significant analysis of the context in which these instances of populism grew, and thus whether each of them is germane to the rise of US populism.

Populism is far more diverse both in its objects and intensity than Glover allows. What each of the examples he shares — and at least one that he did not share: Fascist Italy, 1922-45 — was an intense ethno-nationalism, a paradigm commonly constitutive of populist reactionary movements but not found amongst populist liberal movements. It is surprising that a book so focused on the threat from populism and the need to combat it, even containing a chapter with the title, contains a definition of populism too general to be of any real application. While it includes a dictionary definition on the fly-slip before the introduction, there is no mention of its core concepts — authenticity, connection to the land, conceptions of community, and its demographic bases. There's nothing about American exceptionalism or the recruitment of evangelicals to the Trump cause.

One glaring omission was Glover's failure to recall the 'American Party' of the 1850s and (who aside from anti-Catholic sectarianism) prefigured the appeal of the MAGA movement by more than 160 years. They of course declined into irrelevance and so would not have been a useful precedent. The 'Mugwump' movement of the 1880s on the other hand was arguably also a populist movement — at least by the definition propose by Glover. It was ignored because apart from some useful reforms in the direction of open governance, it never threatened to overturn broader US governance.

Glover's chosen examples are of course selective. It is the case that every significant right-wing populist or fascist movement has a figurehead — a national hero of sorts who *embodies* the nation and is presented in its heroic regalia. In America right now, Trump has that title. Putin is uncontested in Russia. In Ukraine's past, it was Stepan Bandera. Today it's Volodymyr Zelensky, an ex-entertainer who starred in a television show called 'Servant of the People' and used that as his campaign slogan when running for president. Trump similarly ran for POTUS after years heading the reality television show 'The Apprentice'. Glover regards Zelensky as 'charismatic', much as those on the US cultural right regard Trump. It is indeed important to define what is salient and dangerous in populism, and to be equipped to challenge it. Glover who introduces the book 'to Volodymyr Zelensky. Who else?' seems to be amongst those still struggling with that challenge.

This book has its strengths. It's an easy read — something that anyone who finished secondary school with some confidence could read in a day or so. The history it overviews is interesting as well as shocking. For those who don't know the history, it's *absolutely* worth reading. However it's not a reference book, and as an exercise in sounding the alarm and equipping people to fight the threat posed by the hard right, it offers no line of march beyond keeping in mind the vapid 'nine words'. Now that Trump has indeed returned to the office of the president, the world will get a chance to see how much of Glover's concern was well-founded, but however Trump's presidency plays out, Glover's recount will not have equipped them to process history's lessons.

About the reviewer

Paul Esposito is a secondary school teacher, historian, archivist, blogger and political tragic. He has a BA(Hons), G.Dip Ed. in history, politics and sociology.