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THE HOOVER INSTITUTION • STANFORD UNIVERSITY



The ***Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace*** was established at Stanford University in 1919 by Herbert Hoover, a member of Stanford's pioneer graduating class of 1895 and the thirty-first president of the United States. Created as a library and repository of documents, the Institution enters its second century with a dual identity: an active public policy research center and an internationally recognized library and archives.

The Institution's overarching goals are to:

- » ***Understand the causes and consequences of economic, political, and social change***
- » ***Analyze the effects of government actions and public policies***
- » ***Use reasoned argument and intellectual rigor to generate ideas that nurture the formation of public policy and benefit society***

Herbert Hoover's 1959 statement to the Board of Trustees of Stanford University continues to guide and define the Institution's mission in the twenty-first century:

***This Institution supports the Constitution of the United States, its Bill of Rights, and its method of representative government. Both our social and economic systems are based on private enterprise, from which springs initiative and ingenuity. . . . Ours is a system where the Federal Government should undertake no governmental, social, or economic action, except where local government, or the people, cannot undertake it for themselves. . . . The overall mission of this Institution is, from its records, to recall the voice of experience against the making of war, and by the study of these records and their publication to recall man's endeavors to make and preserve peace, and to sustain for America the safeguards of the American way of life.***

***This Institution is not, and must not be, a mere library. But with these purposes as its goal, the Institution itself must constantly and dynamically point the road to peace, to personal freedom, and to the safeguards of the American system.***

By collecting knowledge and generating ideas, the Hoover Institution seeks to improve the human condition with ideas that promote opportunity and prosperity, limit government intrusion into the lives of individuals, and secure and safeguard peace for all.





# *Journey to Fascism*

**Ruth Ricci was a determined American who fell in love with adventure, Italy, and, alas, Mussolini's dream of empire. A timely exploration of wartime propaganda and "fake news."**

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***By Brian J. Griffith***

**I**n March 2022, Patrick Lancaster—an American YouTuber and self-styled “independent journalist”—traveled to the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine to “report” on the mounting tensions building up between Moscow and Kyiv. Embedded with a group of Russian soldiers in the coastal Ukrainian city of Mariupol, Lancaster followed the Russians, camera at the ready, as they repeatedly showed him what they claimed was irrefutable evidence of “neo-Nazi war crimes” committed by Ukrainian soldiers against innocent pro-Russian civilians during the preceding months. In one instance, the Russian soldiers led Lancaster through the remains of a primary school, which they claimed had been destroyed in an explosion by fleeing Ukrainian soldiers. In the building’s basement, the soldiers showed an easily convinced Lancaster the body of a local Ukrainian woman who, they alleged, had been brutally murdered by neo-Nazi members of the Ukrainian National Guard; they pointed to a “swastika painted in blood on her chest.”

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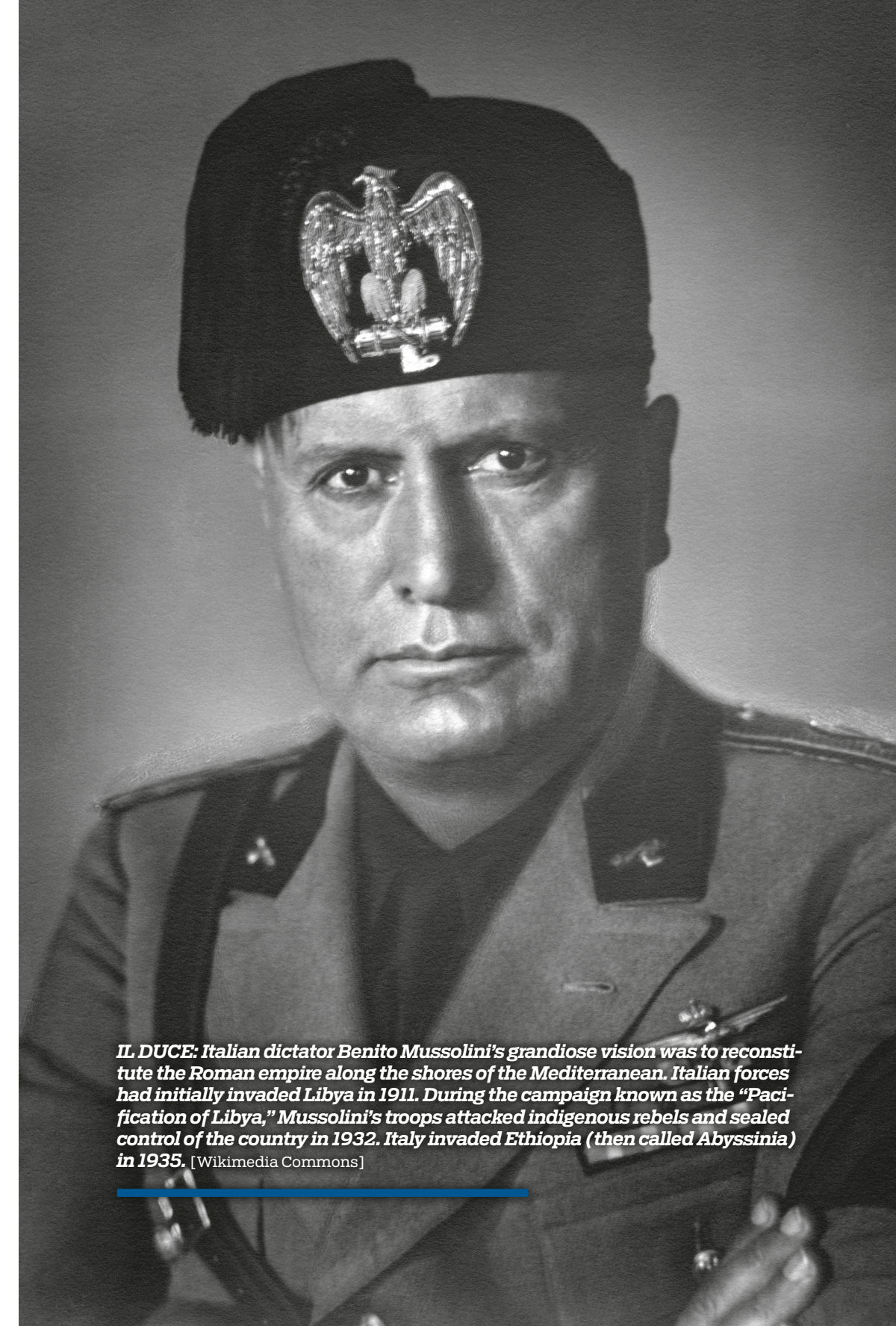
***ADVENTURER: Ruth Ricci (1894–1977), a native of Hilton, New York, was captivated with Italy’s colonial project in Africa, and indignant at what she saw as bigotry against Italians in the United States. She first worked as a volunteer nurse in the Second Italo-Ethiopian war and later roamed Italian-occupied Africa as what today would be termed an “embedded” photojournalist. Here she poses with an unidentified companion.*** [Ruth Ricci Eltse Papers—Hoover

Institution Archives]

While perhaps motivated by a sense of misplaced faith in his mission, Lancaster’s “reporting” on the war in Ukraine serves as little more than recycled Russian propaganda, intended to manipulate international public opinion with respect to the conflict’s origins, its purported moral justifications, and, perhaps most significantly, its intended outcomes. Indeed, as the journalist David Gilbert has subsequently reported, the explosion at the primary school that Lancaster was inspecting had, in fact, been “concocted by the Kremlin as a way to justify its imminent invasion.”

Lancaster’s story is by no means unique. Indeed, throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, authoritarian strongmen, much like Vladimir Putin himself, cultivated relationships with sympathetic “independent journalists” whose job it was to reformulate and rebroadcast their dictatorships’ key messaging strategies to unsuspecting audiences well beyond their



A black and white portrait of Benito Mussolini, the Italian dictator. He is wearing a dark military cap with a large, ornate eagle emblem on the front. He is also wearing a light-colored military jacket with epaulettes and a pilot's wing badge on the left chest. He has a serious expression and is looking directly at the camera.

***IL DUCE:*** Italian dictator Benito Mussolini's grandiose vision was to reconstitute the Roman empire along the shores of the Mediterranean. Italian forces had initially invaded Libya in 1911. During the campaign known as the "Pacification of Libya," Mussolini's troops attacked indigenous rebels and sealed control of the country in 1932. Italy invaded Ethiopia (then called Abyssinia) in 1935. [Wikimedia Commons]

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***CONQUERORS: Capping a military campaign that Italy carried out before its invasion of Ethiopia, Libyan colonial troops parade in front of King Victor Emanuel III of Italy and Governor Rodolfo Graziani during the king's visit to Cyrenaica in February 1932.*** [Wikimedia Commons]

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borders. Propagandists, often highly skilled, willingly disseminated “fake news” on behalf of authoritarian regimes on both the right and the left. One such figure, whose story I will recount here, was an interwar, pro-Fascist American woman by the name of Ruth Williams Ricci.



The story of Ruth Williams Ricci’s six-year entanglement with Benito Mussolini’s dictatorship begins with the “Ethiopian Crisis.” In October 1935, Fascist Italy invaded the East African kingdom of Ethiopia. Intended to demonstrate Italy’s sovereignty and military prowess to the so-called “plutocratic powers” (that is, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States), the Duce’s conquest of Haile Selassie I’s kingdom quickly unraveled into an international crisis, pitting Italy against the majority of the international community. And as the front pages of the major dailies in Paris, London, and New York City began to fill up with critical stories about Italy’s “barbaric” and “illegal” military campaign in East Africa, the regime began actively

searching for alternative channels for subtly reshaping public opinion within the non-Italian communities of Western Europe and North America.

It was within this context of an illegal war of conquest in East Africa, growing diplomatic tensions between Italy and the League of Nations, and rising anti-Italian sentiments in New York City and beyond that Ricci's plans for supporting her adopted *Patria* in its hour of need took shape. The weeks leading up to Italy's invasion, Ricci explains in her partially completed political memoir, *Mine Eyes Have Seen*, "were trying days . . . for people of Italian name and sympathy" in the United States, as there had been a "wave of feeling that swept this continent without logic, without justice, against Italy and the Italians." Reprobatations of both Italy generally and Fascism specifically were "bitter and constant," she elaborates, and for many Italian-Americans the "racial prejudices which had slowly faded during the past decade sprang into new being." It was rare, Ricci continues, "to find an individual who could or would discuss" the question of Italy's purported right to Ethiopia "soberly, sanely, [and] without bias or prejudice." Such "clever and subtle propaganda," she writes, constituted a conscious and deliberate campaign to "arouse public opinion" in America against Italy.

With such "injustices" in mind, Ricci began corresponding with the Italian consulate in New York City, offering her services as a registered nurse in support of the dictatorship's military campaign in Ethiopia. Any travel-related expenses, she assured her contacts at the consulate, would be covered by her vociferously pro-Fascist Italian-American husband, James Vincent Ricci, thereby relieving the regime of any undesirable financial commitments. In early December 1935, she began the first leg of her voyage to East Africa, *without* her husband, by way of the port of Naples.

Between February and May 1936, Ricci served Fascist Italy as both a "*sorella fascista*" (fascist sister) while aboard the SS *Gradisca*—one of the dictatorship's eight hospital ships—and, after her resignation from the Italian Red Cross in April, as an "independent journalist" embedded with Marshal Pietro Badoglio's military column, heading towards Addis Ababa. On May 5, Ricci was with Badoglio's troops as they entered Ethiopia's capital city, which only days before had been abandoned by Haile Selassie I. "Breathless with excitement and emotion, I hung out of the machine as we rode and jolted along the

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***Journalistic reports either explicitly or subtly manipulated by powerful forces have been common in this century and the last.***




rude pathway that led into the city,” she recounted in one of her subsequently published articles, continuing:

A silver-gray haze of smoke lay all over. Burning straw and mud huts, smoking ruins of homes, smoldering, stark, barren eucalyptus trees resembling half-burned telegraph poles. A sharp acrid smell of filth, and decay, smoky ribbons spiraling upward, dogs, mules, sheep, white-shammaed people, dirty white rags displayed as tokens of peaceable intent, lines upon lines of black people, friendly, grinning, applauding, emitting weird calls of welcome—it was all such a kaleidoscopic jumble of dramatic sounds and sights—and—stench.

After motoring into the center of the city, Ricci joined Italy’s military leadership in reviewing the rubble-strewn streets of Addis Ababa and collecting anecdotes from eyewitnesses to the days leading up to the entry of Badoglio’s column of troops. For her various services to Italy’s imperial program in East Africa, the dictatorship awarded Ricci the prestigious War Cross for Military Valor.

After returning to the United States in August 1936, Ricci launched herself into a pro-Fascist propaganda campaign. In addition to publishing a wide range of articles with a number of New York City-based publications, she delivered public lectures on her eyewitness experiences in Ethiopia to audiences in and around Manhattan and spoke with just about any journalist who was willing to interview her about Fascism or Italy’s colonization of Ethiopia.

In many of her essays and speeches, Ricci pointed out specific “falsehoods” printed in the pages of the *New York Times*, the *Times* of London, and other major dailies on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, with respect to the day-to-day details of Italy’s conquest. For example, she wrote, “I could recall reading the newspaper headlines and my attempts to visualize” the city of Adrigat, Ethiopia, on the border with Italian Eritrea, “as I walked up Fifth Avenue the preceding October.” However, by the time Ricci reached the Ethiopian city with Badoglio’s column in the early spring of 1936, she was surprised to realize that “Adrigat remained . . . undestroyed,” despite “reports to the contrary.” She also frequently addressed the controversies regarding Italian war crimes in Ethiopia. In contrast to the “misleading” Anglo-American press coverage of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict, she explained during one speech, the Italian Army “did NOT pillage, did NOT destroy, did NOT massacre!” Instead, as Italy’s armies advanced into Ethiopian territories, “they preserved the methods of a civilizing expedition,” building “roads, bridges,



**COMMANDER:** *In April 1936, Marshal Pietro Badoglio led his forces toward Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, taking Ruth Williams Ricci with them. Ricci, "breathless with excitement," gave a colorful and melodramatic account of the entry into the city, which Haile Selassie I had abandoned just days before. [Wikimedia Commons]*

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***ATROCITIES: General Rodolfo Graziani, shown giving the Fascist salute, commanded Italian forces in Libya in the 1920s and later co-led the invasion into the Horn of Africa, proclaiming, “The Duce will have Ethiopia, with or without the Ethiopians.” Graziani was noted for his brutal treatment of conquered Africans, both civilians and fighters, subjecting them to concentration and labor camps, expulsions, and massacres.*** [Ruth Ricci Eltse Papers—Hoover Institution Archives]

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hospitals, wells” and taking every opportunity to consider “the welfare of the inhabitants.”

Ricci, of course, was purposely ignoring the brutality with which the Italians conquered and “pacified” their colonial territories in the Horn of Africa. In addition to the imposition of heavily regulated white and black residential zones, 1937—the year Ricci spent propagandizing in the United States for Fascism’s supposedly benevolent colonization program—saw a “Black-shirt massacre” of Ethiopian civilians by Italian soldiers, an outrage widely reported in the American and British presses.

In April 1938, Ricci wrote to her contacts in Rome requesting permission to pursue a far more ambitious itinerary in Italy’s African colonies. Having recently purchased a customized Dodge coupe, she explained, she wished to drive herself, unaccompanied, between General Francisco Franco’s

Nationalist territories in Civil War-era Spain and the Red Sea shores of Italian East Africa. Ricci's proposal for a follow-up fact-finding mission through Italy's African colonies was ultimately approved by regime officials, and in June she steamed to Nationalist Spain in order to survey the activities of Italy's "legionnaires" who were supporting El Caudillo's ongoing military coup d'état against the Spanish Republic.

After completing her vagabonding throughout Nationalist Spain, both Ricci and her Dodge chugged via ferry from Gibraltar to Morocco. During the subsequent months, she motored across North Africa,

stopping briefly in Italian Libya and British Egypt, and ultimately landing in the Horn of Africa, where she took up short-term residence in Addis Ababa in order to survey the significant "progress" being made by the dictatorship in Italian East Africa.

In June 1939, Ricci returned to Rome and began planning yet another pro-Fascist propaganda campaign in the United States, which she intended to begin during the subsequent year. In her proposal to the Ministry of Popular Culture, Ricci proposed to carry out a "Project for Propaganda Work in [the] USA," whose primary objective, she explained, was not only to significantly improve Italy's complicated public image in the United States but, more significant, to raise \$1 million over the following two years "from the Italians in [the] USA for the Colonies." Such significant financial resources, Ricci explained to her contacts, could very well be used for purchasing "tractors, small hospitals, X-ray and microscopic and analytical equipment . . . vaccines and intravenous injections for use among the native population," as well as "small movie cameras and projection machines for use among the Residents as propaganda for convincing the natives" of Fascism's purportedly benevolent intentions in its African colonies. To accomplish these lofty objectives, Ricci proposed to publish six books "with possible assistance and collaboration by the authorities," and intended for the proceeds to be "utilized for the Empire." In addition to these major publications, Ricci promised to speak via radio broadcasts and carry out a "coast-to-coast trip" across the United States with her collection of photographs, movie reels, and lantern slides, speaking in "every community and village" that would provide her the

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***Ruth Williams Ricci complained that Italian-Americans were being ostracized: "Racial prejudices which had slowly faded during the past decade sprang into new being."***



opportunity to proclaim the wonders of Fascism's colonization program in Italian East Africa.

While she waited for the regime's reply, Ricci decided to pay a "fact-finding" visit to Adolf Hitler's "New Germany." Driving herself from Fascist Rome to Nazi Berlin in her coupe, Ricci motored through urban and rural Germany, photographing, journaling, and talking "with every type of Ger-

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***"Lines upon lines of black people, friendly, grinning, applauding, emitting weird calls of welcome."***

man" along the way. "I am tremendously impressed with the resources, the magnificent organization, the storm discipline and superb, machine-like

development of the army," Ricci recounted in an interview with the Rochester, New York, *Democrat & Chronicle* in November, noting "above all else the people's devotedly passionate faith in Hitler."

After wandering around Germany for the better part of two weeks, Ricci arrived at the Polish Corridor on August 30. "I was on my way to Danzig to make a radio talk in September," Ricci later recounted to the American journalist Doris Allen. But only a few days later, she witnessed, entirely by chance, the first columns of Wehrmacht soldiers marching into Poland, marking the beginning of the Second World War. As the Third Reich's military campaign escalated in both intensity and scale, Ricci promptly returned to Rome.

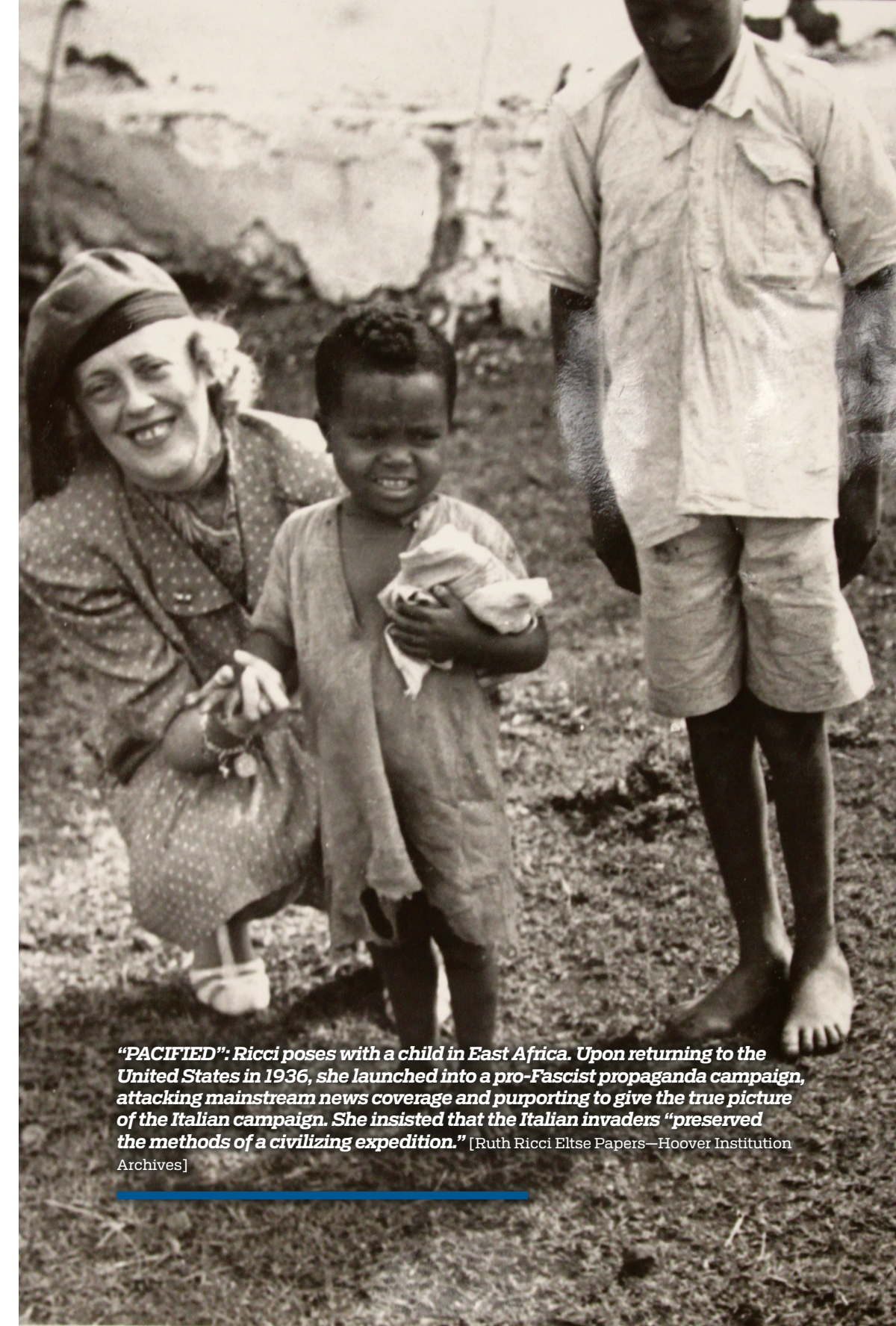
Back in the relative safety of Mussolini's Italy, Ricci immediately immersed herself in a number of pro-Fascist propaganda initiatives, ranging from essays, newspaper and broadcast interviews, and, perhaps most significant, a book-length collection of "photographic notes." Published in 1940 with

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***In 1937—the year Ricci spent propagandizing for the purportedly benevolent colonization program—Italian soldiers massacred Ethiopian civilians, a fact widely reported in the American and British presses.***

the financial support of the regime's Ministry of Popular Culture, Ricci's *Three Years After: 1936–1939* provided its intended Anglo-American readership with a series of highly staged glimpses into Italy's colonization of

Ethiopia, between the early months of the Italo-Ethiopian War and the three years that had, by this time, elapsed since the occupation of Addis Ababa. In covering nearly thirteen thousand miles across Abyssinia "alone, in a Dodge



***"PACIFIED": Ricci poses with a child in East Africa. Upon returning to the United States in 1936, she launched into a pro-Fascist propaganda campaign, attacking mainstream news coverage and purporting to give the true picture of the Italian campaign. She insisted that the Italian invaders "preserved the methods of a civilizing expedition."*** [Ruth Ricci Eltse Papers—Hoover Institution Archives]

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***WHEN IN ROME: Ricci has a photo taken with two Italian officers in Rome. After accompanying the troops in Ethiopia, she requested permission to drive across all the Italian-held territories of North Africa. Her “fact-finding” mission started in Nationalist Spanish territory, where she wrote about the Italian soldiers fighting on General Francisco Franco’s behalf, and reached through Libya, Egypt, and ultimately back to Ethiopia. There she proclaimed the “progress” being made in the Fascist colonies.*** [Ruth Ricci Eltse Papers—Hoover Institution Archives]

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coupe, armed with . . . Leica and movie cameras,” she writes in her introduction, Ricci witnessed how the “lapse of three years has made incredible differences” in terms of Italian East Africa’s infrastructural, agricultural, and hygienic “progress.” Thanks largely to the “determination of the Italian





***ADMIRATION: Published in 1940 with the financial support of Fascist Italy, Ricci's book *Three Years After: 1936–1939* provided its intended Anglo-American readership with a series of highly staged glimpses into Italy's colonization of Ethiopia. She singled out the "determination of the Italian pioneers" and "their amazing task of occupying this vast territory."*** [Ruth Ricci Eltse Papers—Hoover Institution Archives]

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pioneers who swung sturdily from their amazing task of occupying this vast territory in seven months," she contends, Italy had "succeeded beyond even their fondest hopes" in bringing the light of modern, imperial civilization to "Darkest Africa."

The regime, it appears, was deeply pleased with *Three Years After*. "This could be very effective for our future propaganda in the United States," explained one Fascist official, and "all the more so if you think that Ricci has already given good results in the past by proving to be a sincere and passionate friend of our country." Although intended primarily for persuading





***MISGIVINGS: After her Africa adventures and the publication of her book, Ricci began to exhibit second thoughts about the Fascist project once Italy joined forces with Adolf Hitler. She had initially stressed that Mussolini would “steer clear” of getting involved with Hitler’s war in Europe because it wanted to build up its colonies and pursue the rewards of peace.*** [Ruth Ricci Eltse Papers—Hoover Institution Archives]

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American popular opinion with respect to Italy’s colonization program in East Africa, the regime, it appears, sent several hundred copies, out of a total of one thousand, to various Italian embassies and consulates all over the world, ranging from those in Washington and New York City to Tokyo, Shanghai, Bangkok, Kabul, and Tehran.

As Nazi Germany’s military marched across Eurasia, Ricci remained steadfast in her confidence that the Duce would avoid getting involved with the Führer’s military campaign. Italy had “a million reasons to steer clear of the mess,” Ricci informed Henry W. Clune of the *Democrat & Chronicle* in November 1939, including a “huge contract with Isotta Fraschini” to supply Great Britain with engines. Other reasons included the “job of keeping open the Mediterranean routes” and the “time and peace to carry out her projects” in its African colonies. Finally, the regime, Ricci insisted, was planning an exhibition of “tremendous proportions” for the 1942 World’s Fair on the southeastern outskirts of Rome—the so-called E42 fairgrounds complex—which would “see a city extending . . . to the sea and which is already



***COLONIALS: This postcard depicts a member of a colonial artillery unit that was part of Italy's forces. Mussolini claimed to be the protector of Arabs in conquered Libya, going so far as to refer to them as "Muslim Italians." Thousands of native Libyans fought for Italy during World War II. As for Ethiopia, Mussolini told reporters that "our cause in Ethiopia is a just one. . . . It will be laid before the whole world—proof that the Ethiopians are a barbaric people, sunk in the practice of slavery."*** [Ruth Ricci Eltse Papers—Hoover Institution Archives]

showing towering buildings and garden-like plantings of trees, shrubs and flowers," along with new subway lines, world-class hotels, and much more. "Is it a wonder that no one here in Italy gives credence to the imminence of war in Italy?" Ricci rhetorically inquired, continuing: "Can anyone doubt of what tremendous import is peace to the Duce, the Italian people and the government?"

By June of the following year, however, Mussolini had declared war on France and the United Kingdom, drawing Italy into World War II and undermining Ricci's formerly sanguine predictions that her beloved Duce would steer clear of the conflict. A few months later, in December 1940, Ricci received word from Hilton, New York, that her mother had suddenly fallen extremely ill. This, along with Mussolini's decision to join his Axis partners in war, appears to have influenced Ricci's decision to return home to the United States.





***THE RETURN: Ricci returned to New York in 1941, and over the next few years gradually repudiated her romance with Fascism. She even joined the Women's Army Corps and served in uniform. By 1944, she said she had destroyed the medal Italy had given her and formed "a deep hatred for Fascist methods and manner." After the war, she moved west and settled in Berkeley as the wife of Ralph Roscoe Eltse, a lawyer who had served one term in the House of Representatives in the early 1930s. In this picture, inscribed "Always Forward!" and dedicated to "dear Captain Bacchiani," she strikes a characteristic pose in her traveling years. [Ruth Ricci Eltse Papers—Hoover Institution Archives]***

Upon her return to New York in February 1941, Ricci began to temper her formerly vociferous pro-Fascist proclamations, for fear of appearing not only anti-American but as a hostile "foreign agent" for the Axis powers. In addition to the pressures of the Second World War, Ruth's marriage to James appears to have begun disintegrating shortly after her return from Rome. After coming home to Manhattan, Ruth had apparently learned of a long-term love affair between James and a much younger American woman in New York City, which she described in one private letter as "beneath the

belt in every instance.” Ricci’s once-zealous commitments to Mussolini’s Italy began to grow weaker and weaker.

In December 1943, Ricci joined the Women’s Army Corps, traveling between the United States, Southeast Asia, and Australia. By 1944, she had completely repudiated her affiliations with Italian Fascism. In one interview with a newspaper in upstate New York, for instance, Ricci proclaimed that she had “destroyed

the Italian War Cross

... some time ago,”

largely because she had had “lots of time and opportunity to form a deep hatred for Fascist methods and manner in whatever guise.”

“In explaining ‘then’ and ‘now,’ ” journalist Doris Allen told her readers, “Mrs. Ricci said she had spent years abroad watching the ruthless march of Fascism and Nazism, a thing she feels no one could do without hating the horrors such ideologies instill.”

That same year, just as the Allies were preparing to invade the German-occupied coastline of western France, Ricci published an essay on the importance of newspapers to the preservation of liberal democracy in the United States and beyond. Titled “Fortresses of Freedom,” Ricci’s essay maintained that while the “Allied nations fight with an armed victory,” only the American press, with accurate coverage of domestic and international affairs, was capable of winning a

“lasting peace.” “Our

newspapers,” the essay’s

subtitle exclaims, “are

our spiritual fortresses which preserve the four freedoms they helped

America win.” Only America’s “Fortresses of Freedom, standing side by side with American democracy,” Ricci concluded, perhaps somewhat aware of the extraordinary irony of her words, “can guide the world’s destiny.” Ricci’s essay would go on to receive the first place prize in the American Newspaper Publishers Association’s 1944 monograph competition, which was subsequently covered by nearly every major and minor daily across the United States.

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***“This could be very effective for our future propaganda in the United States,” a Fascist official said of Ricci’s book.***

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***Ricci began to have misgivings about her praise of Fascism, and feared she would be considered a “foreign agent.”***



After the war, Ricci relocated to Berkeley, California, where she and her second husband, Ralph Roscoe Eltse, retired. On April 14, 1977, Ricci died at the age of eighty-two en route to Herrick Memorial Hospital. She and her second husband are buried at the Golden Gate Mausoleum and Columbaria in El Cerrito, California. After she died, Ricci's collected writings, photographs, and newspaper clippings, which she had carefully organized during her latter years, were donated by one of her Bay Area acquaintances to the Hoover Institution Library and Archives.



The significance of Ruth Williams Ricci's story goes beyond the tumultuous two decades between the First and Second World Wars. Indeed, today's political scene bears many of the same sociopolitical markers of Europe's so-called "interwar crisis," including a waning confidence in democratic institutions and practices, a growing number of authoritarian—and, in some cases, openly neo-fascist—political leaders, right-wing militias engaged in campaigns of political violence, and the proliferation of "fake news" as an anti-democratic, mass manipulation strategy.

In aping Mussolini's politics of brinksmanship during the 1930s, Russia's strongman president Vladimir Putin is testing what the world is willing to tolerate, in terms of undermining the primacy of diplomacy over unilateral militarism. As in Italy's North American propaganda campaign of the 1930s, Putin's regime has partnered with, either directly or indirectly, figures who willingly reformulate his dictatorship's talking points regarding the origins,

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***In 1944, having renounced Fascism, Ricci wrote an essay in a publishers' contest praising America's newspapers as "fortresses of freedom." Her essay won first prize.***

and intended outcomes, of the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine. Much as in Ricci's day, Patrick Lancaster's status as an "independent journalist" in the Donbas largely depends upon the

Kremlin's explicit knowledge, approval, and guidance. And with Lancaster's 523,000 YouTube subscribers, many of whom speak only English, and more than 672,000 views of his video report on the aforementioned Mariupol bombing, Putin's propaganda stratagem appears to be paying off.

Ricci, in her various ways, enthusiastically promoted an illegal conquest of a sovereign East African kingdom as a civilizing mission. This military

campaign demonstrated the League of Nations' weakness, emboldened other interwar strongmen to defy the international order—above all, Adolf Hitler—and helped

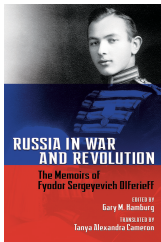
push the Western world into World War II. The questions for the citizens of today's liberal democracies

are these: Are Putin's international propagandists helping in any way to undermine democratic values and practices, to disseminate "fake news" stories regarding Russia's objectives in Eastern Europe and, in the process, to lay the groundwork for a third world war? Are we in another interwar crisis? And who will tell us the truth? ■

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***"Fake news" will no doubt persist as an anti-democratic strategy of mass manipulation.***

***Special to the Hoover Digest.***



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