Twitter Thread by Parker Molloy

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If you're curious what Trump's defense will look like, all you have to do is turn on Fox News. My latest at @mmfa

The tl;dr is that for years right-wing media have been excusing Trump's violent rhetoric by going, "Yes, but THE DEMOCRATS..." and then bending themselves into knots to pretend that Dems were calling for violence when they very, very clearly weren't.

And in fact, this predates Trump.

In 2008, Obama was talking about not backing down in the face of an ugly campaign. He said "If they bring a knife to the fight, we bring a gun."

https://t.co/i5YaQJsKop

> "Every once in a while what he really means slips out like yesterday on the Today Show," Obama said of McCain's comment about leaving troops in Iraq.
>
> He warned that the general election campaign could get ugly. "They're going to try to scare people. They're going to try to say that 'that Obama is a scary guy,'" he said. A donor yelled out a deep accented "Don't give in!"
>
> "I won't but that sounded pretty scary. You're a tough guy," Obama said.
>
> "If they bring a knife to the fight, we bring a gun," Obama said. "Because from what I understand folks in Philly like a good brawl. I've seen Eagles fans."

That quote was from the movie The Untouchables. And there's no way anybody reading that quote in good faith could conclude that he was talking about actual guns and knives. But it became a big talking point on the right.

https://t.co/vBb0gbaQkz

In 2018, Obama-era Attorney General Eric Holder was speaking to a group of Georgia Democrats about GOP voter suppression. He riffed on Michelle Obama's "When they go low, we go high" line from the 2016 DNC.

"Michelle always says, ‘When they go low, we go high.’ No. No. When they go low, we kick them. That’s what this new Democratic Party is about. We’re proud as hell to be Democrats. We’re willing to fight for the ideals of the Democratic Party," he said.

So as not to be misunderstood, Holder even said, “Now, when I say, you know, ‘we kick ‘em,’ I don’t mean we do anything inappropriate. We don’t do anything illegal."

But it didn't matter. It was obvious that he wasn't talking about actually kicking anyone. Fox News just ran with it. They edited out the context where he even explains that he was speaking figuratively. Then they pretended he was being extremely literal.

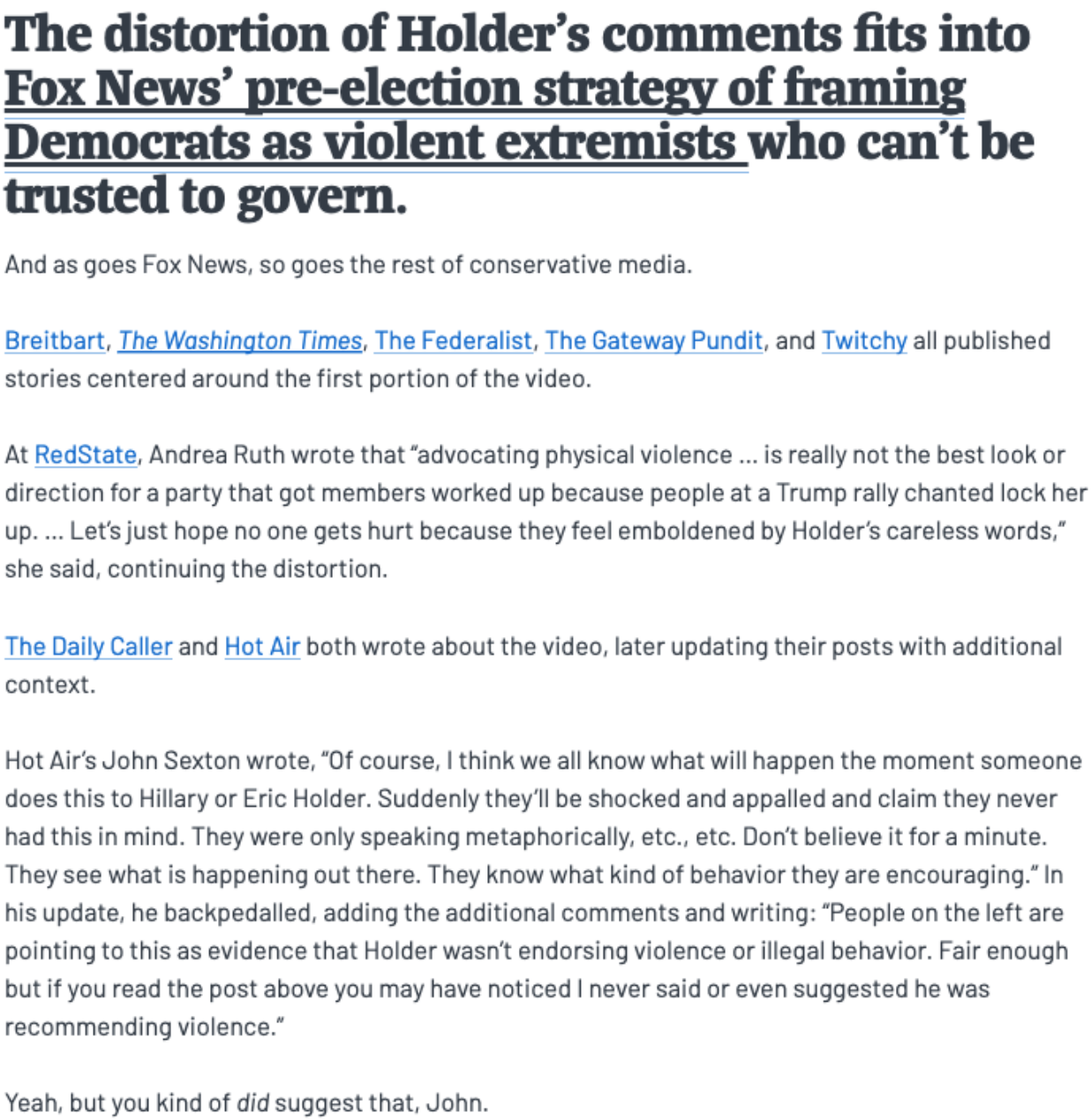
Seriously, watch this.



Trump called into Fox & Friends that day. He called Holder's comment "disgusting" and "dangerous." Then he went on to talk about how nice and peaceful his rallies were (seriously), and then brought up a conspiracy theory about George Soros paying protesters.



When I wrote about it at the time, I highlighted just how quickly the Holder story spread throughout right-wing media, and how much they all pretended that he was speaking literally. https://t.co/pzck9v1ncm



The distortion of Holder's comments fits into Fox News' pre-election strategy of framing Democrats as violent extremists who can't be trusted to govern.

And as goes Fox News, so goes the rest of conservative media.

Breitbart, *The Washington Times*, The Federalist, The Gateway Pundit, and Twitchy all published stories centered around the first portion of the video.

At RedState, Andrea Ruth wrote that "advocating physical violence ... is really not the best look or direction for a party that got members worked up because people at a Trump rally chanted lock her up. ... Let's just hope no one gets hurt because they feel emboldened by Holder's careless words," she said, continuing the distortion.

The Daily Caller and Hot Air both wrote about the video, later updating their posts with additional context.

Hot Air's John Sexton wrote, "Of course, I think we all know what will happen the moment someone does this to Hillary or Eric Holder. Suddenly they'll be shocked and appalled and claim they never had this in mind. They were only speaking metaphorically, etc., etc. Don't believe it for a minute. They see what is happening out there. They know what kind of behavior they are encouraging." In his update, he backpedalled, adding the additional comments and writing: "People on the left are pointing to this as evidence that Holder wasn't endorsing violence or illegal behavior. Fair enough but if you read the post above you may have noticed I never said or even suggested he was recommending violence."

Yeah, but you kind of *did* suggest that, John.

If they thought Holder was being literal when he said "No, when they go low, we kick them," did they think that Michelle Obama meant "when they literally duck down on the floor, we take flight?" No, of course not. They just feign ignorance.

Fox covered that story for about a week. Every once in a while, someone on the right will include Holder saying that in one of their "oooOoOoO, look at Democrats advocating for violence!" compilations, even though that's just flat-out false.

Another example of people on the right purposely taking words out of context to pretend that Democrats advocate violence: In January 2017, Tim Kaine talked about opposing the administration by fighting in Congress, in the courts, in the streets, online, and at the ballot box.

Democrats senators led healthcare rallies -- Save Our Healthcare -- on Martin Luther King Day in about 75 cities around the country, including Richmond. Tens of thousands of people rallied to save our health care. Then, the Women's March that was organized at a grassroots label. Then, people coming out in protest of these orders. So, the way we get outside the bubble is we take advantage of this tremendous public outcry against the administration.

What we've got to do is fight in Congress, fight in the courts, fight in the streets, fight online, fight at the ballot box, and now there's the momentum to be able to do this. And we're not afraid of the popular outcry, we're energized by it and that's going to help us do our job and do it better.

Naturally, right-wing outlets decided to run with that quote, making sure to highlight him saying "in the streets," so as to make it sound like he was talking about actual physical violence rather than, you know, marches. https://t.co/59mCecNKXr

In 2018, there was this whole thing about "civility." A Virginia restaurant owner asked Sarah Sanders to leave because of her work in the Trump administration, and it set off a whole controversy.

That story made the rounds on right-wing and mainstream media, which unfortunately resulted in the restaurant owner becoming the target of a pro-Trump mob that would throw actual poop at her restaurant https://t.co/hgB8AHo4mb

(If you're unfamiliar with that story, here it is. https://t.co/y2P38s8Imr)

Days later, Maxine Waters was speaking to a group of people and basically encouraged them to do what that restaurant owner did should they see members of the Trump administration in public, pointing to the implemented family separation policy.

While speaking to a small crowd of people in June 2018, Rep. Maxine Waters (D-CA) urged people to protest and confront Trump administration officials in public over the recently implemented family separation policy:

> Let's make sure we show up wherever we have to show up. And if you see anybody from that cabinet in a restaurant, in a department store, at a gasoline station, you get out and you create a crowd. And you push back on them. And you tell them they're not welcome anymore, anywhere. We've got to get the children connected to their parents.
>
> We don't know what damage has been done to these children. All that we know is they're in cages. They're in prisons. They're in jails. I don't care what they call it, that's where they are and Mr. President, we will see you every day, every hour of the day, everywhere that we are to let you know you cannot get away with this.

Trump and Republicans immediately recontextualized Waters' comments as a call "for harm to supporters, of which there are many, of the Make America Great Again movement."

(What the restaurant owner did, what Waters encouraged, etc., that's something I think reasonable people can disagree on. However, it's clear that Waters wasn't calling for violence, and it's important to keep that separate. Still, that's a major right-wing example used.)

Dan Bongino went on Fox to clutch his pearls. https://t.co/eOYAyifvIU

Now, that's not at all to say that there isn't politically-motivated violence from people on the left. Hell, in 2017, a guy whose FB was filled with anti-Trump/anti-GOP content shot 5 people at a GOP baseball practice!

https://t.co/J0SKny65Xw

After that shooting, right-wing media jumped in to blame everyone from Snoop Dogg to Shakespeare for it. https://t.co/V33bnZWFeL

1. **Snoop Dogg**: WorldNetDaily cited Snoop Dogg as an example of a left-wing figure whose opposition to Trump "adds up to a culture teetering on the brink of disaster." Fox's Eric Bolling also referred to Snoop Dogg when he claimed, "Crazy people act on the crazy things they hear from politicians and celebrities."

2. **President Obama**: Right-wing radio host Michael Savage alleged that former President Barack Obama had "been screaming for" people to "kill" or "shoot" others.

3. **Madonna**: Fox's Steve Doocy and Sean Hannity and far-right outlets WorldNetDaily and Breitbart blamed Madonna for the shooting.

4. **New York theater production of *Julius Caesar***: Fake news purveyor Freedom Daily cited a New York theater production of *Julius Caesar* as a cause of the attack, saying the show's Caesar — who is assassinated — represented Trump.

5. **Former Attorney General Loretta Lynch**: Bolling, far-right conspiracy theory outlet Infowars, and fake news purveyor TruthFeed blamed former Attorney General Loretta Lynch for the shooting, citing her remarks about how those who have fought for social justice bled and even died for their causes.

6. **Sen. Tim Kaine (D-VA)**: Infowars and TruthFeed took Sen. Tim Kaine (D-VA)'s comments about "fight[ing] in the streets" out of context to blame him for inciting violence.

Another example from 2017 that right-wing media tried to turn into an example of "Democrats call for violence" was the mangling of Loretta Lynch urging people to keep pushing forward even if times were tough. https://t.co/7oHUP7YajS

"I know that this is a time of great fear and uncertainty for so many people. I know it's a time of concern for people who see our rights being assailed, being trampled on, and even being rolled back. I know that this is difficult, but I remind you that this has never been easy. We have always had to work to move this country forward to achieve the great ideals of our founding fathers. And it has been people, individuals who have banded together, ordinary people who simply saw what needed to be done and came together and supported those ideals, who have made the difference. They've marched, they've bled — yes, some of them have died. This is hard. Every good thing is. We have done this before; we can do this again."

Going into the 2018 midterms, the GOP and right-wing media coalesced around a message of "Jobs Not Mobs." The idea was that Democrats were violent while the GOP would never do such a thing. https://t.co/QN0jVexW1w

> Fox & Friends' election message: Dems are the party of the mob and antifa, Republicans are the party of jobs. pic.twitter.com/nwNPaNo5PP
>
> — Matthew Gertz (@MattGertz) October 15, 2018

Fox even went so far as to pretend that a Proud Boys attack on protesters was "the mob" of the left attacking Republicans. Just the total polar opposite of reality. https://t.co/P9ir9lEUIs

> Fox & Friends is ignoring the Proud Boys' violent attack on protesters Saturday following its leader's speech to a GOP group. Instead, the show is talking about left-wing incivility pic.twitter.com/HaeRfoWJwP
>
> — Media Matters (@mmfa) October 15, 2018

The entire strategy going into those midterms was basically to try to scare their viewers into thinking that Democrats were trying to literally kill them. As @MattGertz wrote at the time: https://t.co/OHVVd2miGI

https://t.co/eKwsKWrre3

https://t.co/5mrqgvZVnU

That night, Proud Boys founder Gavin McInnes volunteered the group to be "foot soldiers" for the Republican Party https://t.co/Pf94Bfy98W

It should also be noted that the "Jobs Not Mobs" video that started that whole slogan in October 2018 originated on the ultra-violent r/The_Donald reddit page (which has since moved to its own site) https://t.co/8n90WkphEN

But the whole thing is all part of a larger strategy of accusing Democrats of inciting violence by pointing to statements and actions that absolutely do not incite violence.

Right-wing blogger and crusades-enthusiast Ryan Saavedra tried to pretend that Biden called for a "physical revolution" in 2019 (he didn't; he called for finding common ground, explicitly saying that he wasn't calling for a revolution) https://t.co/QN35wlumPx

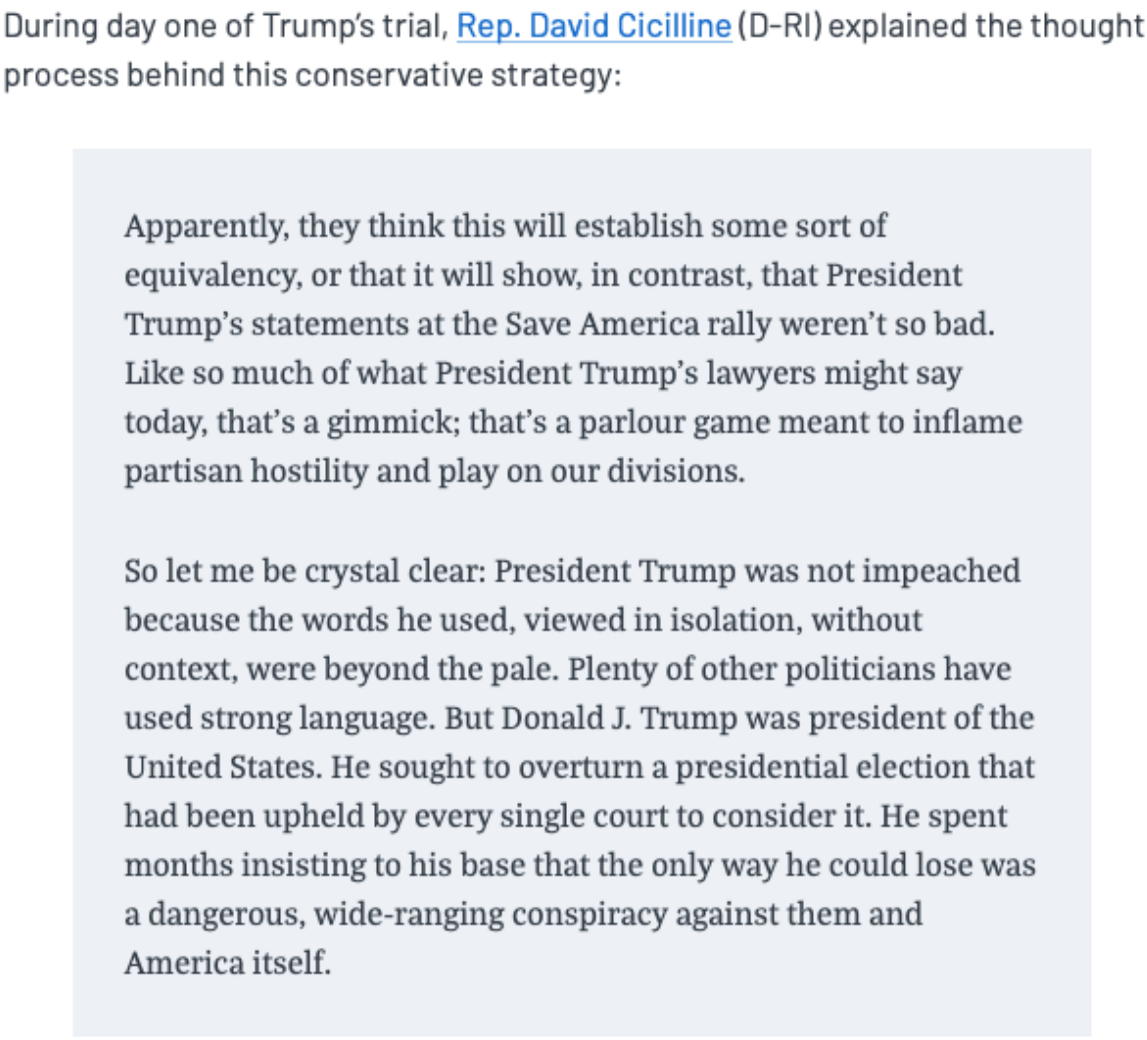
We all understand that simply using the word "fight" or "beat" or whatever... that's not necessarily a call for violence.

Anyone who says that "Well, Politician X said we have to fight for this bill clearly means physical violence!" is not a serious person.

And throughout Trump's entire time in office, that's been a common theme: pretending that the issue people have with something Trump said being a specific forbidden word being used rather than what he said in using it.

When Trump called a handful of places "shithole countries," the right-wing response was "Look, here's an example of someone else saying the word 'shit!'" which is very obviously not the problem people had with it. Same goes with the Access Hollywood tape.

It was good to see @RepCicilline explicitly lay this out during the first day of the trial. https://t.co/HUdWqtRyaj



During day one of Trump's trial, Rep. David Cicilline (D-RI) explained the thought process behind this conservative strategy:

> Apparently, they think this will establish some sort of equivalency, or that it will show, in contrast, that President Trump's statements at the Save America rally weren't so bad. Like so much of what President Trump's lawyers might say today, that's a gimmick; that's a parlour game meant to inflame partisan hostility and play on our divisions.
>
> So let me be crystal clear: President Trump was not impeached because the words he used, viewed in isolation, without context, were beyond the pale. Plenty of other politicians have used strong language. But Donald J. Trump was president of the United States. He sought to overturn a presidential election that had been upheld by every single court to consider it. He spent months insisting to his base that the only way he could lose was a dangerous, wide-ranging conspiracy against them and America itself.

In May 2020, ABC News was able to find 54 cases of people invoking Trump in connection to violence/treats/assaults https://t.co/UEeL0GUY6K

Last month, Vox catalogued all the times Trump encouraged political violence. https://t.co/pHP7JvXbDj

The only surprise about January 6 was that it took this long for his violent mob of supporters to try to overthrow the government.

He's been doing this the whole time, and he's been praised for it. Here's Fox & Friends excitedly tweeting about Trump's "strong message" in 2016 https://t.co/QWda6AGCWm

> "I'd like to punch him in the face." @realDonaldTrump sends strong message to protester at rally last night!https://t.co/hYBRl3llHz
>
> — FOX & friends (@foxandfriends) February 23, 2016

I try to cover that and more in my piece published today. It's what you're likely to hear in Trump's defense: https://t.co/HUdWqtRyaj