Twitter Thread by Alex

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On this day in 1945 Soviet forces liberated Auschwitz-Birkenau. It was the largest concentration and death camp. 1.1 million people, 90% of them Jews, were murdered there. Today it is an international day of commemoration, to honor the memory of all victims of Nazi extermination.



A few things to keep in mind on International Holocaust Remembrance Day:

1) The Soviet liberation of Auschwitz is a deeply symbolic event, but it is worth noting that allied forces were liberating Nazi camps until May of 1945. Unspeakable suffering and death continued for months

I bring this up because the popular perception of events is informed by primary school practices which present them with clean start and stop dates. Useful for repeating dates, but less useful for having an understanding of what forces you unleash and what it takes to unwind them

When we talk about the lessons of the Holocaust, too many fall into the trap of "if it's not identical to Auschwitz, it's not worth invoking the Holocaust."

The seeds for the Holocaust were laid long before Auschwitz was opened, and the Holocaust continued after its liberation.

2) Every year on this date you can reliably expect a debate on what it is we are commemorating. A small but loud group of people use this date as an opportunity to play suffering olympics. Resist the urge to engage with these fools.

On International Holocaust Remembrance Day we honor the memory of *all* victims of Nazism. That includes Jews who comprise the majority, but also gentiles including the Roma, Poles and Soviets, the LGBTQ, the disabled, and those who

were murdered for opposing Nazism.

This is not an invitation to downplay the Nazi extermination of the Jews. The Nazis rose to power on demonizing Jews. It helped them recruit collaborators. At the height of the war with the Soviets they still prioritized killing Jews over getting supplies to their forces.

Put simply: the war of extermination against all "lesser" peoples in the eyes of the Nazis was organized around the belief that first the Jews must be exterminated. Every choice the Nazis made, including the murder of other peoples, was informed by this framework.

3) We need more than symbols. As @TimothyDSnyder wrote:

Auschwitz, generally taken to be an adequate or even a final symbol of the evil of mass killing, is in fact only the beginning of knowledge, a hint of the true reckoning with the past still to come.
https://t.co/FuqXkJj1Zk

For those who never click in, the above essay outlines why Westerners know about Auschwitz, but not about the actual majority of Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust.

Most were executed across what is today Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, and the Baltic states. Few ever saw a camp

The symbols we use to represent the Holocaust are too often the end of our education.

I wrote about this at some length the last time there was a controversy involving Anne Frank.
https://t.co/l1EI17uGiq

4) Due to superficial understandings, the simplistic idea is the Nazis were the bad guys and the people who fought them were the good guys.

The Nazis didn't see themselves as the bad guys. Neither did the Germans who voted for them or the people who collaborated with them.

Jews don't need you to identify with those of us who went through the Holocaust. Seeing yourself as the underdog is a tool to make yourself comfortable, not to challenge the injustice in the world you inhabit today.

Ask yourself what you have in common with our persecutors.

Are you equipped to recognize and oppose those who wish to persecute and exterminate others? Do you understand who in your own society today shares assumptions and motivations that drove people to Nazism?

Do you take ownership of your responsibility to oppose these forces?

If you're unsure, I encourage you to take the opportunity to learn more about the Holocaust. You will gain a better understanding of antisemitism, of racism, of those who wish to harness hate for power, and how to confront them.

That's how you can honor the legacy of this day.