Twitter Thread by PeterGelderloos

PeterGelderloos
@PeterGelderloos

The Invention of Whiteness: the Spanish Laboratory
a thread

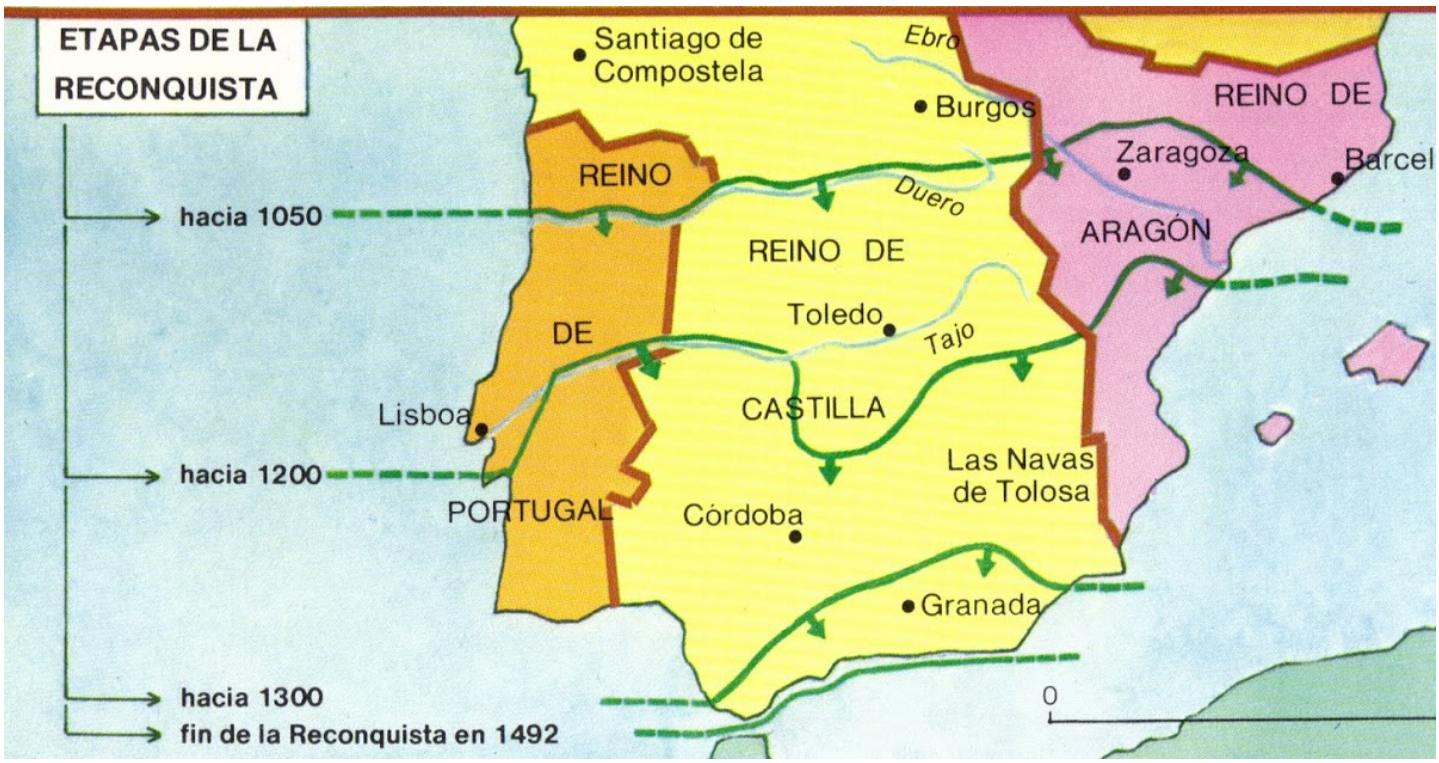
To mourn the first day of the Invasion, I'm sharing thoughts from a future book. Much has been written on British colonization of Ireland as a laboratory for creating whiteness in the anglo world. Much less has been...



...written on the equally important Spanish experience, owing in part to anglocentric historiography and to a simplistic anti-imperialism only capable of focusing on the evils of Anglo-US dominance, and denying the centrality of whiteness to Iberian and Latin American societies.

In fact, Spain itself was invented as an integral part of this process of colonization and the creation of whiteness.
It's the year 1000. The concepts of Spain or a white race do not yet exist. Most of the Iberian peninsula is inhabited by a diverse Muslim society. The western...

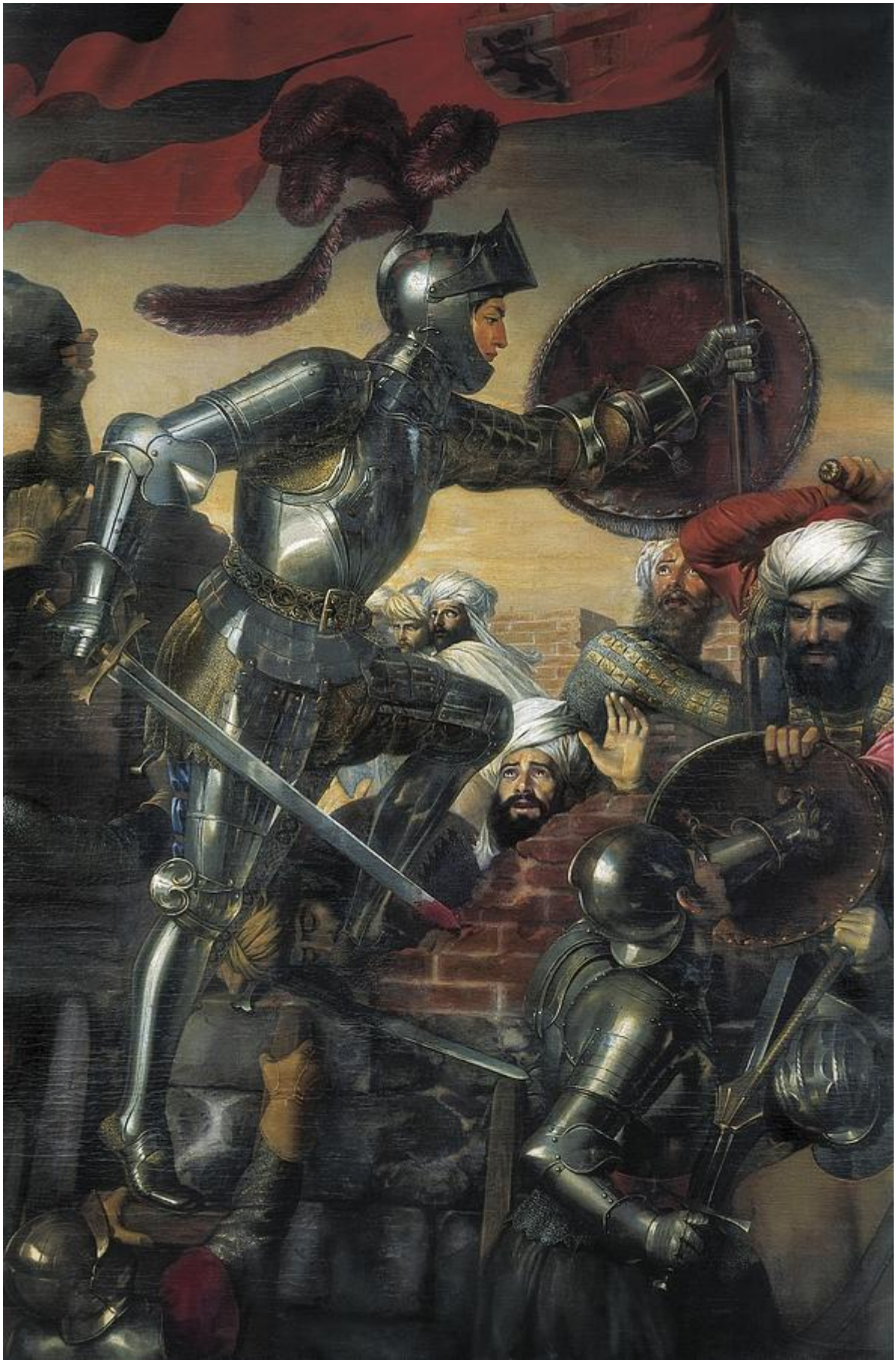
fringes of Christendom are organizing a major holy war to conquer this territory and exterminate the Muslims (note that many Christians and Jews live peacefully in the Muslim territory).
Spanish mythology will later refer to this as a "Reconquest" but the political & cultural...



groups that organize it did not exist when Muslim armies first took over Iberia around 720. Christian wars of conquest will last more than 500 years and will include frequent massacres of civilians. The bloody process will shape Castillian practices of warfare and create an...

economy entirely dependent on enslavement and territorial conquest. By 1400, feudalism can no longer support the swollen class of poor and landless knights, hidalgos, who morph into a mercenary class supporting themselves through bloodshed and the hope of getting rich by...

success in battle. 1492 is a key year. The Granada War marks the conquest of the last Muslim polity. The Catholic armies kill and enslave 100,000 people. The war facilitates the centralization of the states of Castille and Aragón-Catalunya (though "Spain" is still a few...



centuries away). In 1492, the Catholics complete their total genocide against Jews and Muslims on the peninsula through murder, enslavement, or forced conversion. But they have a problem: now there is no territory to conquer, no infidels to enslave, remaining on the peninsula.

And who was on the battlefield at the end of the Granada War? A Genovese slaver named Colombo. Needing a new territory for conquest and enslavement, the monarchs Isabela and Ferran agreed to finance his expedition to the west. First with three ships. When Colombo reported riches



and many local people who could be enslaved, the monarchs furnished him with 17 ships for the second voyage. Colombo's hidalgo mercenaries used many of the same tactics against Indigenous people that they had developed in the centuries of the Conquest, beginning the largest war

in world history. Conquest and colonization were justified w/ Christianity, enslavement and murder justified w/ accusations the Indigenous were demonic. Christianity had become the prototype for whiteness: a mark of superiority, vehicle for capitalism, & discourse of coloniality.



In the Spanish state, October 12 is celebrated as the Day of Spanishness (Día de la raza in many LA countries), a clear example of construction of the Western human through destruction of the Other. The mythology of the "Reconquest" was promoted by the Church & fascist regime.

Hannah Arendt qualifies the Nazis' biological racism as "modern" in comparison to the religious racism of Catholic countries (a peculiarly German pride of exceptionalism even in matters of extreme horror). In fact, this other paradigm of white supremacy is more "advanced" than...

its biological/essentialist cousin because it can become perfectly postmodern due to the central feature of conversion: in the Spanish paradigm, people can convert to whiteness, whiteness is a way of moving through the world. This allows racial capitalism/the State to recruit...

more widely among the oppressed, holds out the carrot of integration, rewards the adoption of the oppressor's worldview, and yet always regards the converted with suspicion, just as "conversos" from Jewish or Muslim families in "Spain" were frequently persecuted, and had to be...

more murderously Christian than anyone in order to be accepted.
Over the last decades, this is the form that white supremacy, outside the far Right, has more frequently taken. May we remember this history and all who suffered it. Death to whiteness, capitalism, and the State.

