Twitter Thread by David Neiwert



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@DavidNeiwert

1) “Eliminationism” is a term you need not just to become familiar with, especially in today’s American rush toward authoritarianism. This will be a long, illustrated thread explaining what it means, how it works, and why Donald Trump is now our Eliminationist in Chief.



Warning: Some images contain violence and are disturbing.

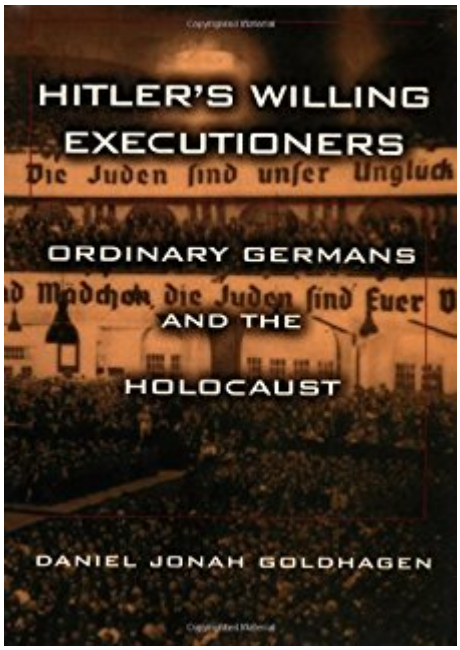
Also warning: This thread is ridiculously long. 75 tweets is insane. I apologize. But this stuff is important. I hope you find it compelling anyway. If not, I understand.

2) So, what exactly do we mean by “eliminationism”? Here’s the academic definition:

Eliminationism:

The belief that one's political opponents are "a cancer on the body politic that must be excised—either by separation from the public at large, through censorship or by outright extermination—in order to protect the purity of the nation"

3) It was largely coined by Holocaust scholar Daniel Jonah Goldhagen in his 1996 book Hitler's Willing Executioners, about the role ordinary Germans played in the Holocaust, which he described as fueled by "eliminationist antisemitism."



4) The book describes how in reality the largest numbers of Jews and other victims killed by Nazi directive were rounded up and gunned down or immolated en masse and buried in mass graves by ordinary Germans and non-Jewish residents of German-occupied territories.



5) Here’s a scholarly discussion of it. We’ll keep it simpler here for everyday readers.

https://t.co/AAguJpCJxT

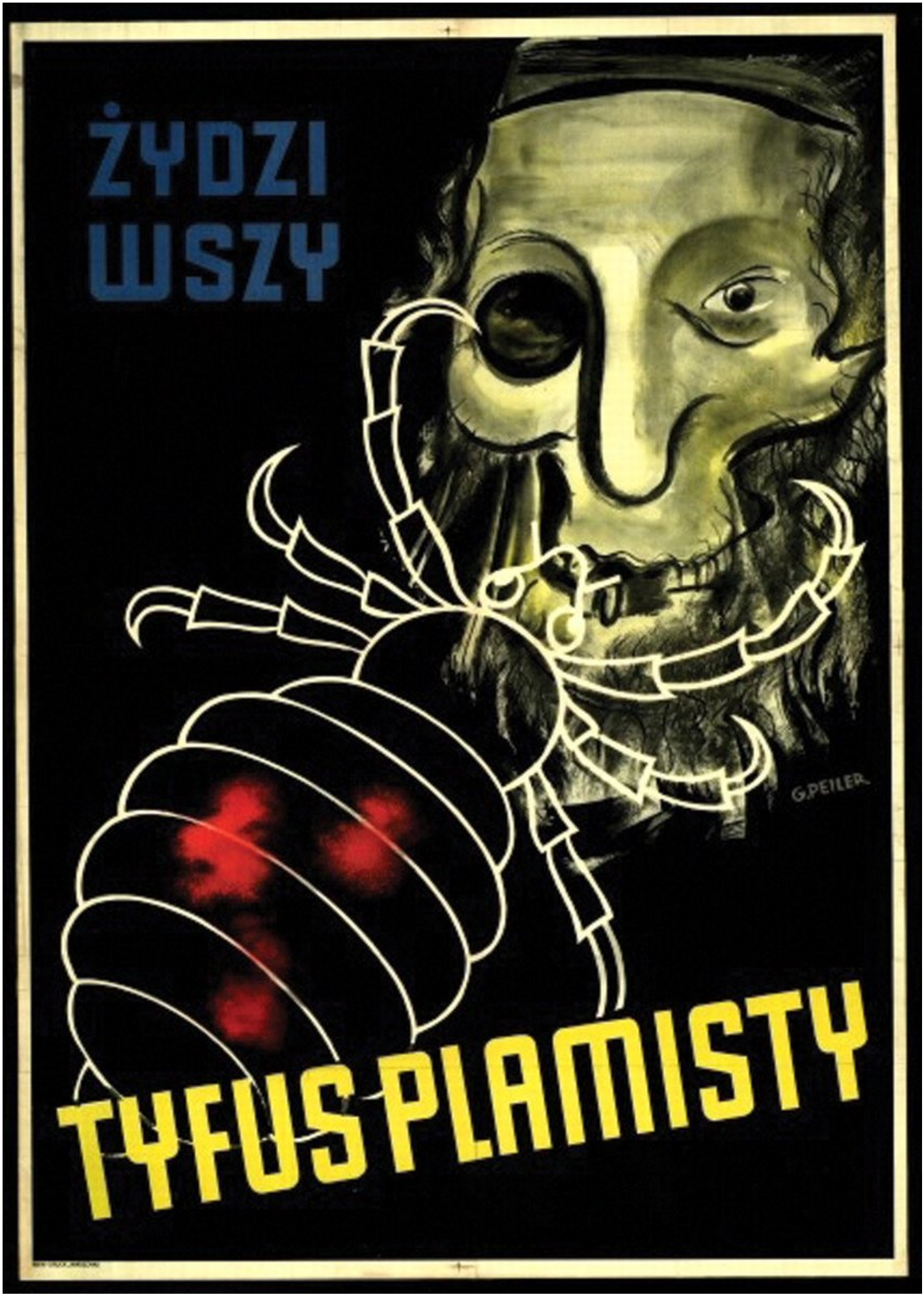
6) As I’ve explained previously, eliminationism first is expressed in rhetoric, and then that rhetoric inspires action. It’s a rhetorical twofer, expressing both contempt (placing the target beneath them) and disgust (evoking the impulse to purify).

https://t.co/o91H5qs8W1

7) Eliminationist rhetoric has very distinct and immediately identifiable traits. It always depicts its opposition as simply beyond the pale, and in the end the embodiment of evil itself -- unfit for participation in their vision of society, and thus in need of elimination.



8) It often depicts its designated "enemy" as vermin (especially rats and cockroaches or lice).


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9) It also associates them with disease, depicting them either as diseases outright or as carriers of horrible diseases such as leprosy. We have seen multiple recent examples of this, thanks again to Lou Dobbs and Fox.

https://t.co/3RUObslGu0

10) At other times, it depicts them as “invaders” or their presence as an “invasion”:



11) A slightly less virulent variation on this are claims that the opponents are traitors (who will “stab us in the back”) or criminals, or gross liabilities for our national security, and thus inherently fit for elimination or at least incarceration.



12) Regardless, any target of eliminationist rhetoric is depicted as a threat to the purity of the community – with clear sexual overtones. They are often depicted as threats to “virtuous white womanhood” – that is, potential rapists.



13) And yes, it's often voiced as crude "jokes", the humor of which, when analyzed, is inevitably predicated on a venomous hatred.



14) The most important aspect of eliminationism, however, is how it functions, i.e., what it does: It creates permission. And what it creates permission for, ultimately, is the unleashing of our darkest id, our violence. It's easier to kill something you see as vermin.



15) Eliminationism is buried pretty deeply in the European psyche, closely associated with early Christian notions of filth and purification, which often related to violent means of ridding the world of sources of contamination, including self-flagellation.



16) It also grew out of early Christian beliefs about the world outside of their own, particularly “wild” places full of “savages” who were not always deemed human. Those same beliefs became closely associated with other views about filth and contamination, the domain of women.



alamy stock photo
EWFWY8
www.alamy.com

17) The most egregious outbreaks of eliminationism in early Europe were the anti-Jewish pogroms that began in about the 12th century and were often associated with returning Crusaders.

https://t.co/UAeGH9kaKv



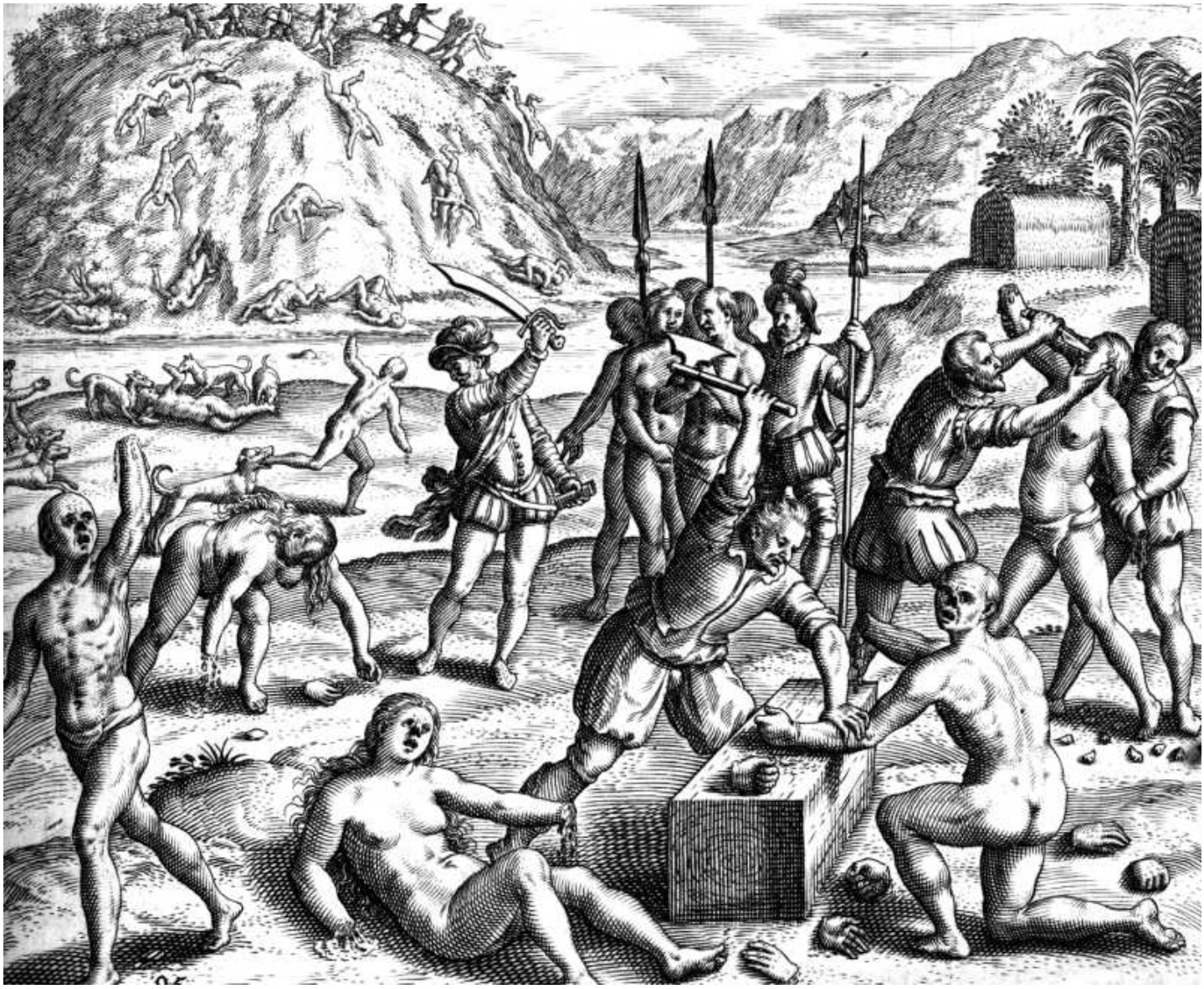
18) This later morphed into such phenomena as the various Inquisitions, notably those in Spain, which featured mass killing events known as autos-de-fe:



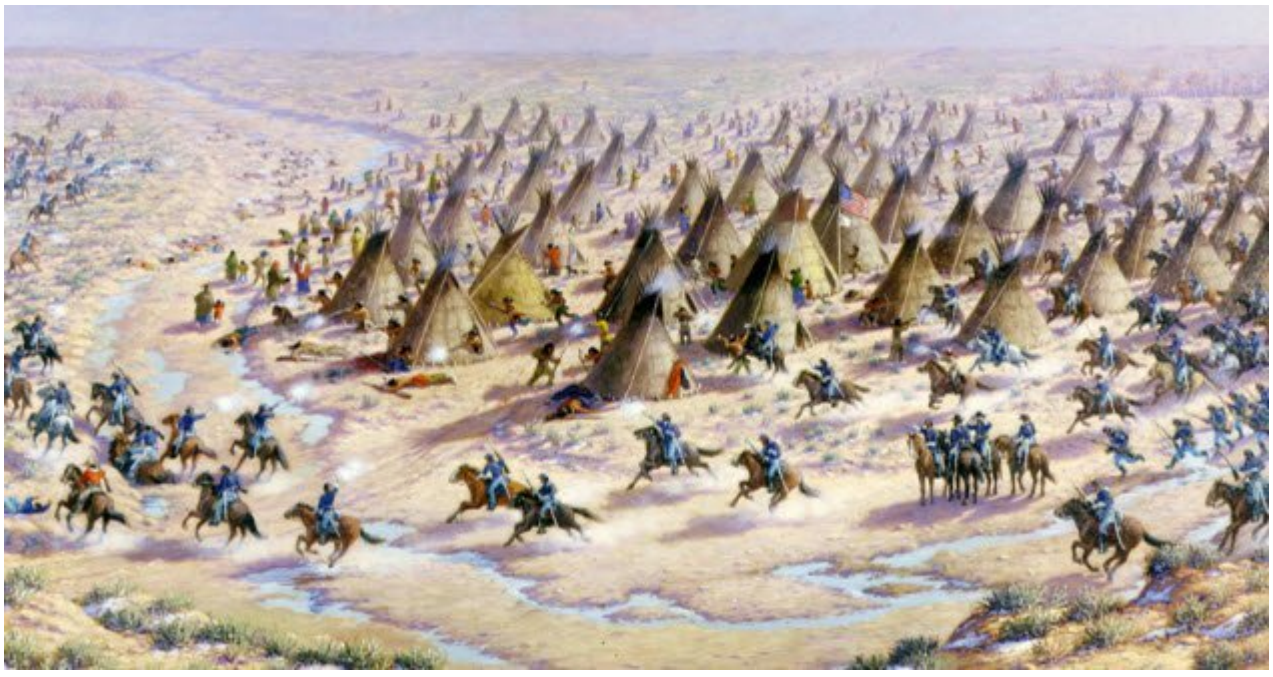
19) When Europeans arrived on the American continent, this attitude translated neatly into the genocidal treatment of the indigenous population there. Indeed, early Spanish invaders used autos-de-fe as a means of imposing “discipline” on Mayan natives.



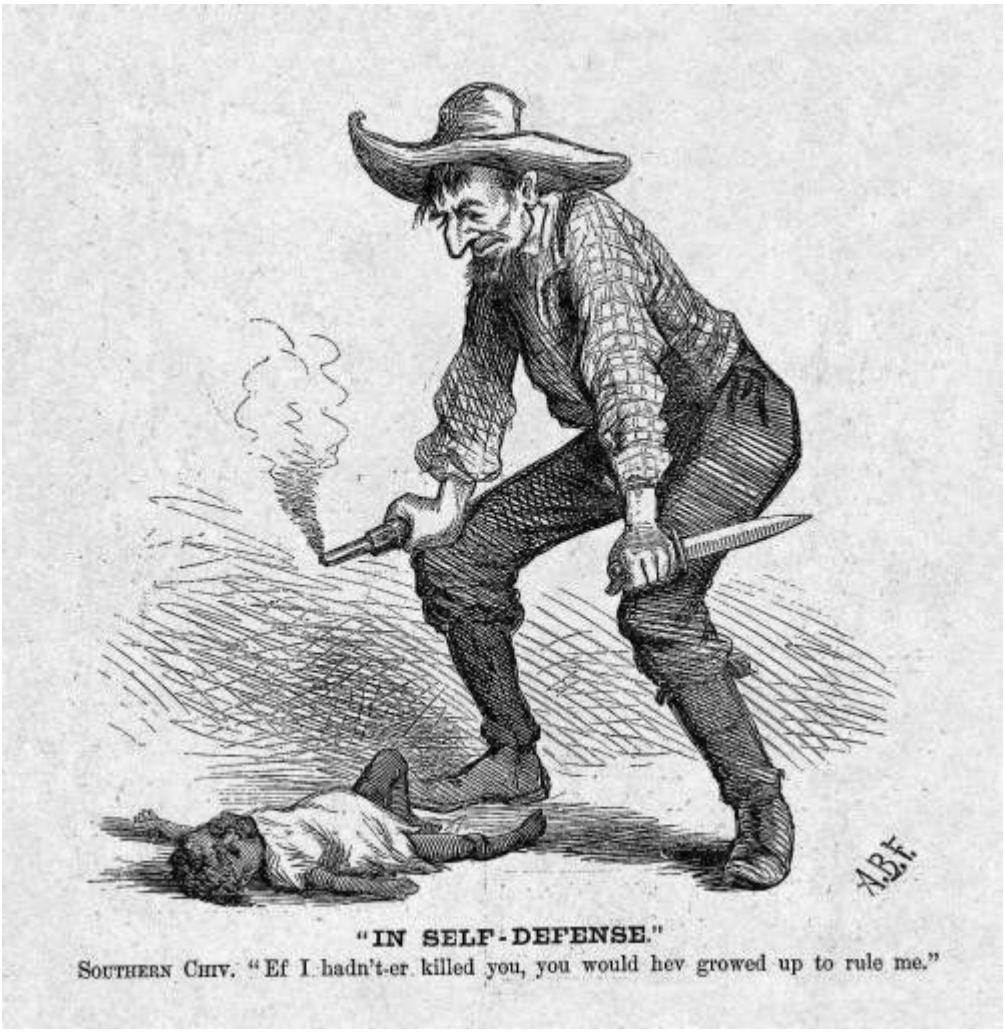
20) These attitudes deepened and hardened over the ensuing centuries. By the time American settlers engaged in the process of depriving Native Americans of their land holdings over the course of the 19th century, their subhuman status was considered a given.



21) Thus, when Col. Jamers Chivington ordered his men to massacre women and children at Sand Creek in Colorado in 1864, he justified it with the exhortation: “Nits make lice!” An estimated 500 people, all natives, were killed.



22) These attitudes remained intact among American whites well after the genocide of Native Americans had been more or less completed in the 1880s. Indeed, after the outcome of the Civil War, eliminationist racism became much more focused on freed African American slaves.

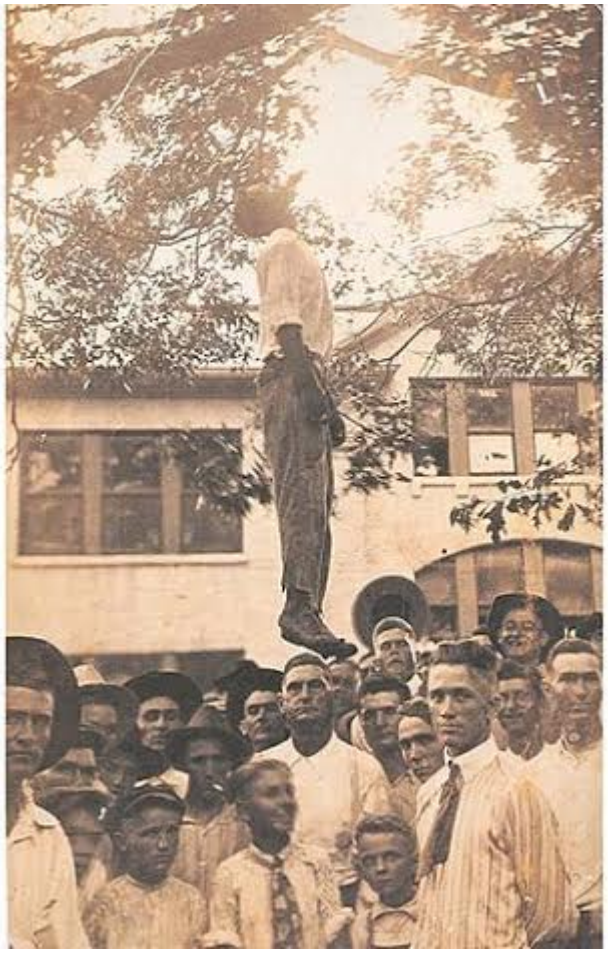


"IN SELF-DEFENSE."
SOUTHERN CHIV. "Ef I hadn't-er killed you, you would hev growed up to rule me."

23) Most eliminationist rhetoric portrayed blacks as innately criminal and lazy, and black men as an omnipresent rape threat. This threat was used to justify literally thousands of extralegal lynchings between 1880 and 1940, in what became known as “the lynching era.”



24) Lynching was a cornerstone of the legal disenfranchisement of black people after the Civil War in the South, which was better known as “Jim Crow.” The black populace was terrorized into submitting to this disenfranchisement by the threat of being hanged.



25) Much of this history has been intentionally buried for decades, and white people are shocked to learn about it now as it resurfaces. Most black folks, on the other hand, have been aware of it for years.

https://t.co/KgssDDpzOk

26) Eliminationist rhetoric had a psychosexual component. It described men as “black beasts” and “jungle animals,” and dwelt on black men’s physical features and virility. Black lynchings were unique in that the victims were usually mutilated sexually; lynched whites were not.



27) The attitudes underlying this eliminationism were common not just in the South but throughout the country. This is why the “Sundown town” phenomenon was most prominent outside the South.

https://t.co/ClOOVFO4oD

28) Sundown towns – which had ordinances forbidding black residency after sunset – were explicitly eliminationist in nature.



29) They often were associated with a racial-cleansing event in which the black neighborhood of a town would be burned out and its residents forced to flee. They called these “race riots.” They reached a peak in 1919, in what was called the “Red Summer.”

https://t.co/ZfIGfzNpMx



30) The largest of these occurred in Tulsa in 1921, in what had once been an economically prosperous black district. White men in planes dropped incendiary bombs from planes during the assault.

https://t.co/TkHhHBSv2t



(Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society).

31) Asians were also the targets of eliminationism. First came the Chinese, who were first to arrive in the West with the railroad crews that crossed the continent. Inevitably they became targets of nativists, many of them involved in labor unions, who saw them as competition.



32) Indeed, the idea to “build that wall” dates back to those days.



33) Asians in general were depicted in nativist propaganda as inhuman, insidious, even demonic.



34) They also experienced how eliminationist rhetoric translated into mass death. White miners in Rock Springs, Wyoming, went on a rampage in September 1885, wiping out a Chinese community estimated at 700-900.

https://t.co/2KuGTdP9uX



35) After the passage in 1872 of the Chinese Exclusion Act, which outlawed immigration from China, railroad companies who were still completing lines across the continent decided to recruit labor from Japan to replace the Chinese. By 1900, their numbers became substantial.



36) Unsurprisingly, nativist elements soon seized upon the Japanese immigration just as it had to the Chinese: To demonize them as “unassimilable,” and demand the flow be stopped. The immigration was labeled an “invasion” and the immigrants’ presence a “menace.”


An American Paper That Fights for Americanism

The Seattle Star

LATE EDITION

TWO CENTS IN SEATTLE

MORE REVELATIONS MADE IN

JAP MENACE!

IS THIS TO REMAIN

WHITE MAN'S LAND?

Mutual Business Club Asks for State Prob

WHAT JAPS OWN HERE

37) The hysteria around Japanese immigration became known as the “Yellow Peril,” in which Japanese immigrant farmers were depicted as an insidious invasive horde, plotting the eventual invasion of the Pacific Coast by the Emperor.



38) It was intertwined with the popularity of racial eugenics, led by a couple of bestsellers that depicted Asian immigration as the most dire existential threat facing America: "The Passing of the Great Race," and "The Rising Tide of Color Against White World Supremacy."

THE PASSING OF THE GREAT RACE

MADISON GRANT



39) All this agitation translated into legislation and policy, including court rulings that affirmed that Asians were ineligible for naturalization, as well as a host of state laws such as “alien land laws” that were designed to disenfranchise Japanese immigrants.



FIVE MEN KILLED ON PACIFIC FLEET WARSHIP!

The Seattle Star

LATE EDITION

DEPORT JAPANESE

SAYS BURLESON IS "TRUST" LACKEY

DEMANDED BY SECRETARY OF VETERANS' COMMISSION

NEW RATES OF NO EFFECT HERE; SAYS OFFICIAL

PHONE COMPANY MAKES RATES

ORDER MAY WORD BUT ON HANDS

Cruel Cop Takes All Joy Out of This Little Party

MEXICANS SEIZE AMERICAN BOY

40) It also produced the Immigration Act of 1924, which was known in the press at the time as the Asian Exclusion Act. It forbade any further immigration of any kind from Japan or anywhere else in Asia. It formed the basis of our current immigration law.



Day

CIRCULATION BOOKS OPEN TO ALL

Times the Paid Circulation of Any Other New London Paper.

NDAY AFTERNOON, MAY 26, 1924 FOURTEEN PAGES PRICE THREE CENTS

IMMIGRATION BILL IS SIGNED BY PRESIDENT; JAPANESE BAN BECOMES EFFECTIVE ON JULY 1

Victim

40 OSTRICHES WILL RACE WITH HORSES

BERLIN, May 26.—Horses are apparently not fast enough for Berlin sporting circles. Therefore, as an extra thrill, an enterprising manager has announced that 40 ostriches with their jockeys, mostly Italians, are coming here in the near future for races with horses in which, on a distance of 5,000 meters for example, the horses are to be given 1,000 meters handicap. The races will be held on the fashionable Grunewald race course.

SPENDING MONEY RECKLESSLY; SON ASKS FOR RELIEF

Waterbury Woman Raises $1,000 to Give Second

READY FOR BONUS PAYMENT

President, However, Issues Statement in Which He Expresses Disapproval of Action of Congress

GIVES REASONS FOR SIGNING THE BILL

If Exclusion Provision Stood Alone, Says the President, He Would Have Disapproved It

WASHINGTON, May 26.—The immigration bill was signed today by President Coolidge.

Despite the provision making Japanese exclusion effective next July 1, put into the measure over the vigorous opposition, the president decided to approve the bill because of other considerations.

It was pointed out that inasmuch as the present immigration law expires on June 30, a veto might have made it necessary to rush through an emergency measure in the closing hours of the session.

Such a step, the president felt, would not be practicable in view of the tangled legislative situation and the restraints that any emergency measure would be beset by many elements at amendment and possibly

41) The eliminationist attitudes about the Japanese were still very much alive 17 years later when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941, especially the beliefs that those farmers were secret shock troops for the Emperor, waiting for their signal.



A typical American cartoon from early 1942.



42) These attitudes fueled the hysteria that swept the Pacific Coast after the outbreak of the war with Japan, and eventually led to their forced removal and incarceration in concentration camps for the war's duration.



43) American eliminationism was key to the development of the fascist agenda in Europe. Hitler, in “Mein Kampf,” credited the genocide of Native Americans for inspiring his notions of “Lebensraum” [“living space”]. Jim Crow inspired the Nuremberg Laws.

https://t.co/OLUhsVZU27

44) Eliminationism became much less popular after the war and the reality came home from Europe showing the world the real-world results of that kind of rhetoric.



45) Nonetheless, it remained an undercurrent in right-wing rhetoric over the years, even as former favorite targets – blacks, Jews, Native Americans, Japanese Americans – gained civil rights protections in the 1950s through the 1970s, often at great cost. It just shifted targets.



46) The LGBTQ community became a popular target in the 1970s and ‘80s, even as gay rights became a reality. During the 1980s AIDS crisis, it was not uncommon for gay-bashing “Christians” to argue for the forced removal of gays in a “quarantine.”



47) There was even a 1986 initiative in California, led by Lyndon LaRouche's cult, titled Proposition 64, was intended to enable health officials to "quarantine" gays by incarcerating them.

https://t.co/FSs3lCsPyb



48) Gay-bashing hate crimes became popular with right-wing thugs, too. And of course, laws against hate crimes were targeted by religious-right anti-LGBTQ organizations, and are resisted by them to this day.



49) In the 1990s, those of us who monitor right-wing extremists observed that many white supremacist groups were shifting their gears to begin recruiting around the issue of immigration in a focused manned. And sure enough, we started hearing the rhetoric.



50) It was familiar, just like nativist rhetoric directed at waves of immigrants before: They sucked off taxpayers, they took away jobs, they brought crime and diseases, they were part of a plot to destroy white America, they would never fit in as Americans.



51) It melded with the remnants of the 1990s paranoid Patriot/militia movement and emerged as the “Minutemen,” vigilante border watchers who were going to stop immigrants coming over the border and the New World Order along with it. They talked about shooting border crossers.



52) The Minutemen were fueled by the usual toxic mix of paranoid conspiracy theories and visceral ethnic loathing of Latinos, and eventually crumbled into a pathetic but lethal circus of criminality and epic, Coen-Brothersesque bizarro tragedy.

https://t.co/G1aOz6FfcC

53) But the movement also clearly activated a strand of white supremacist activism that had not made itself public for many years. This was taken at a California anti-immigrant rally in 2006.



54) Barack Obama’s presidential candidacy seemed to open the door for mainstream conservatism to become host to extremist ideas. It also inspired an immediate violent backlash, embodied by Jim David Adkisson’s 2008 attack on a liberal church.

https://t.co/kSuUctoZvT



55) During the Obama years, all these strands came together under the yellow Gadsden banner (previously a Patriot/militia symbol) of the Tea Party, which became a conduit for far-right extremism and its attendant eliminationism:

https://t.co/kKhLY4RcqW

56) Obama was subjected to a number of smears and paranoid conspiracy theories at the hands of the far right (and Fox News) during his tenure. The most oddly enduring of these was the “Birther” theories about his Hawaiian birth certificate, which was patently baseless and racist.



57) Beyond the racism, there was always an undercurrent of eliminationism to the delegitimization underlying the whole enterprise: It made Obama into The Other, a Not American, an Alien. “Patriot” protesters outside the White House demanded his hanging.

https://t.co/HsVRiaakOQ

58) And the most prominent promoter of the claims that his birth certificate had been faked was Donald J. Trump. It became the basis of his political career.



59) Trump also declared himself the leader of the Tea Party. Over time, that was what he became.



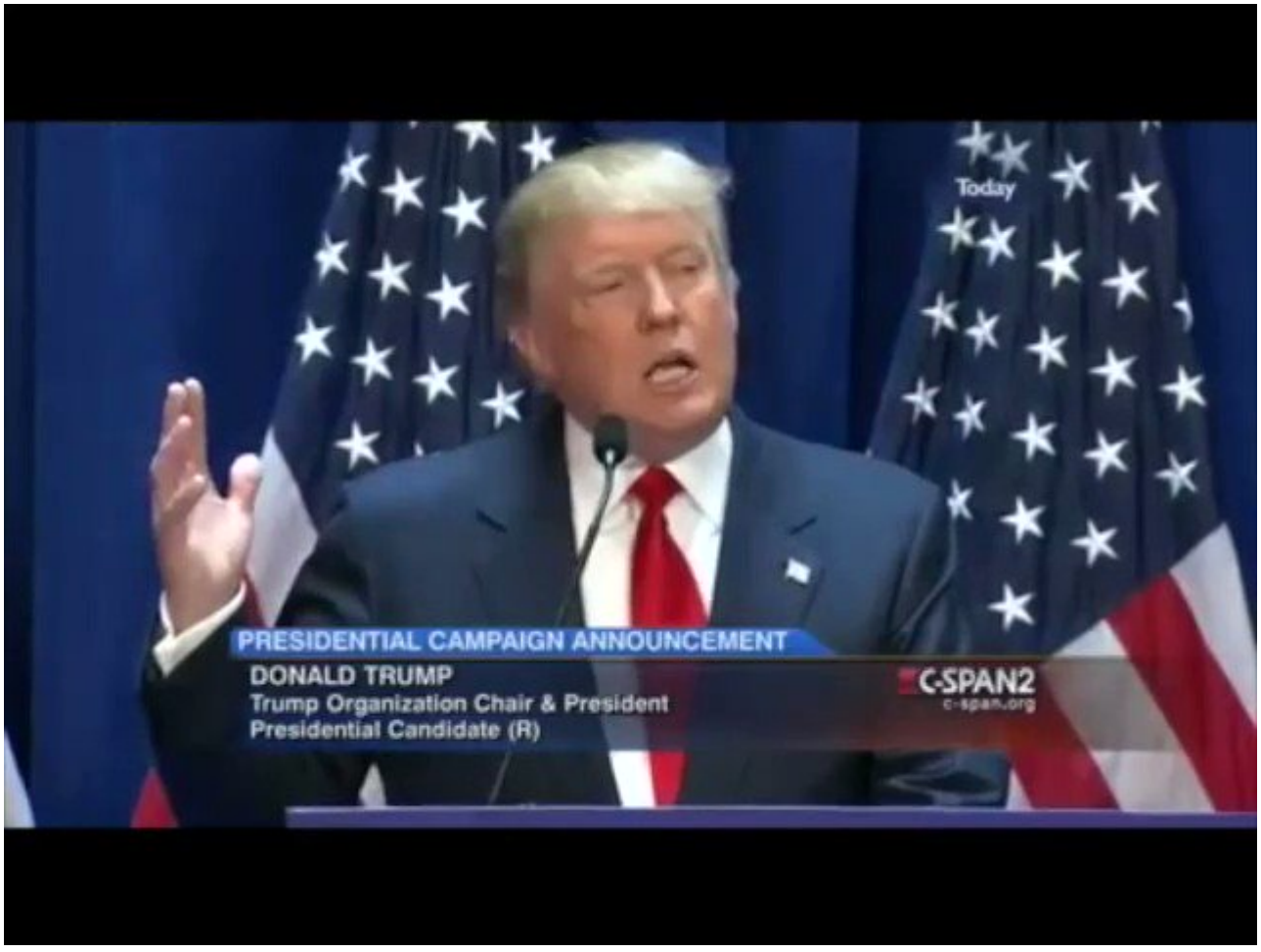
60) In the meantime, the far right kept escalating its hatred of immigrants by reviving Minuteman-style vigilante groups on the southern U.S. border.



61) Militia/Patriots also became increasingly involved in conspiracy-fueled resistance to Muslims and to refugee programs.



62) That was the environment in which Trump announced his candidacy in June 2015, and immediately set an overtly eliminationist tone – describing Mexican immigrants as rapists and criminals – from the outset. It never ceased.



63) The same kind of eliminationist rhetoric was directed at Muslim immigrants generally, as he talked about imposing a ban on immigration from Muslim nations. He also indulged harsh rhetoric against refugees, warning that he intended to “send them back!”

https://t.co/TcVpatCaPN

64) There was an unstated eliminationist element to Trump's demand to imprison Hillary Clinton, accompanied by "Lock Her Up!" chants, with its implication that liberals could be imprisoned on his say-so, for their politics alone. It was chilling.

https://t.co/XOKlV5EIUY

65) The apotheosis of Trump's eliminationist rhetoric, however, was his regular reading of the poem "The Snake," which depicts a "silly woman" who revives a dying viper (immigrants) only to be bitten by it. A classic depiction of humans as toxic vermin.
https://t.co/Gh8m40gXxS

66) Trump's eliminationism never stopped since winning the election, either. In addition to an anti-immigrant policy, he has notoriously used rhetoric throughout his presidency, including the well-noted incident in which he sneered at "shithole nations."

https://t.co/LwgyEkzgdb

67) Then there was the time he notoriously sent out a tweet describing immigrants as "infesting" the country, as though they were lice and their nits:

https://t.co/nlTk4EWtwB

> Democrats are the problem. They don\u2019t care about crime and want illegal immigrants, no matter how bad they may be, to pour into and infest our Country, like MS-13. They can\u2019t win on their terrible policies, so they view them as potential voters!
>
> — Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) June 19, 2018

68) And in recent weeks, he's been escalating the rhetoric. He's been attacking liberals as an "angry left-wing mob" and saying "they've become, frankly, too dangerous to govern. They've gone wacko."

https://t.co/lpnHhUUWau

69) Along similar lines, but more intensely, he's been ratcheting up the fear around immigration issues by making the approach of a caravan of would-be political asylum seekers from Central America into a Reichstag-like national security crisis.

https://t.co/m9jGAs3b4B

70) It hasn't been just Trump, either. The eliminationist rhetoric around the Caravan has been everywhere. It was the No. 1 story on Fox News. At Trump's favorite show, Fox & Friends, Brian Kilmeade talked about the caravan as a disease vector.

https://t.co/mEoSm7RCm7

71) Trump's own fearmongering on the Caravan, also classically eliminationist – calling them "invaders" and calling out American troops – has been received ecstatically by extremists on the radical right.

https://t.co/5I4GO1Z74V

72) Unsurprisingly, it was precisely this heightened hysteria over the Caravan that spurred the Pittsburgh synagogue shooter, in no small part because of the latent antisemitism around the right's immigrant fearmongering, especially their Soros fetish.

https://t.co/IqGjWI4HLy

73) This is called scripted violence: The person with the megaphone announces the script identifying the targets for elimination to the followers, and who then act out the terroristic violence that has been scripted for them. Read @cberlet on this.

https://t.co/17Y8w6S7CD

74) Trump has been writing the scripts and the unhinged elements of his followers have been carrying it out. That's especially evident in the case of the #MAGAbomber, who sent out pipe bombs to people and entities (CNN) identified by Trump as targets.

https://t.co/gPaV5uUV6N

75) So far, the tactic has worked for Trump. But it is a dangerous time for America. Remember the historic purpose of eliminationist rhetoric, even the jokes, is always the same: giving permission. Permission for the darkest corners of the American psyche to emerge.

