Twitter Thread by Elizabeth Spiers



Elizabeth Spiers
@espiers

I keep seeing people on here suggest that making fun of the neo-Nazis undermines an understanding of how dangerous they are. I disagree. I think ridiculing them is both good and necessary. A short thread:

First: ridiculing Nazis is a great American tradition: https://t.co/MiazEc22FC

Satire is a potent cultural weapon and has been utilized in a political context since ancient times. It serves several functions: in a scenario where it's used to skewer people in power, it's a way to speak truth to power.

In a context more like this, where it's used to ridicule a guy in a silly costume who demands organic food for his shaman diet, it serves a related but slightly different purpose. Everyone needs to understand how dangerous that guy is.

And his stated desire to assassinate members of Congress make that clear. But if you only understand that guy as emblematic of a visceral danger to both individuals and the republic, and only portray him as a grave threat, you run a different risk:

You unwittingly valorize him as an emblem of extraordinary evil. And he is not extraordinary. There are a million people like him who didn't end up at the Capitol. He is just a dude. People who commit heinous crimes are rarely exceptional.

Very often, they are ridiculous, stupid, otherwise seemingly normal. You can be extremely silly and dangerous at the same time. Look at our president.

And if you think someone can't be ridiculous and homicidal at the same time, you don't understand the depth of the problem, or how it manifests. So we need to communicate the danger, but we also need to point out that Party City Shaman is not a supernatural villain.

Turning these guys into emblems of extraordinary evil makes them into outliers, and they are not. They are not particularly smart or wily and this kind of radicalization can happen easily, and to unremarkable people.

Depriving them of self-importance is one of several ways to attack that inflated status. They should be held accountable, and understood as threats, *and* ridiculed, endlessly.