Twitter Thread by Jeff Sharlet



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Those dismayed at what is evidently considerable support for Trump must remember that fascism isn't a fad. It takes time to grow. It's been growing a long time. It will take a long time to root out. This will be the work ahead, even if Trump holds on for now. 1/

I think, too, we shld see past 1:1 conflation of American racism w/ fascism. Former is prerequisite of latter. It's always been there. Fascism hasn't. Fascism is racism surging *&* converging w/ multiple tributaries of violence (fantasy & fact), grievance, & personality cult.

So on one hand, Trump isn't an aberration; on the other, yes, he is worse than what's come before. I believe Trumpism is an inevitability. I also believe there is real historical reason to hope that its defeat--not yet, whoever wins--is also an inevitability. 3/

There have been U.S. fascisms before. The Klan, of course, & its politicians. I think also of the 1930s New Order of Cincinnatus, which elected a governor. They rejected the sieg heil salute as "*too* fascist." Emphasis theirs. They wanted just the right amount. 4/

And there have been plenty of racists in the White House. Trumpism is different--in part because of its vile wink, its grotesque "irony." Real fascism, the metastatic kind, is marked by a perversion of wit. That's how it gathers up fellow travelers. 5/

The Family, the fundamentalist movement I've written about, refers to itself as an avant-garde, after Lenin. Mussolini saw himself in similar fashion. Fascisms are comprised of cores. Usually they go no further. Sometimes they gather what Germans apparently call "mitläufers."

If I understand the German correctly, it refers to the masses who sometimes--now--cohere around fascist cores. The twisted irony of fascism & the effective delegitimization of the press allow these "mitläufers" to add to fascism's power w/out acknowledging its crimes.

In practical terms: Voting for Trump is a racist act. Many Trump voters, though, including his BIPOC supporters, find that idea absurd. White supremacy at its most explicit wears a hood & a cloak for a reason. It's potent because it cultivates denial as well as declaration.

I'm not a strategist. I don't know the best way to fight *this* fascism, which is like & also not like those that preceded it. My bet, tho, is that while the differences don't matter to its victims, they do matter to the struggle against it.

Which is why even as we understand that white supremacy is the *heart* of Trumpism I think we must see simultaneously the ways in which it also tells other lies as well. Those other lies are cloaking devices. Rip them away, one by one.

--& recognize that exposing lies won't be enough. The anthropologist Susan Friend Harding writes in her brilliant study The Book of Falwell that many of Falwell Sr's followers knew he was a serial liar. They wanted the lie; they experienced it as an opportunity for collaboration.

I've seen that time & again in my own reporting on the Right. I remember my time spent @ megachurch of Christian Right leader Pastor Ted Haggard, later revealed to be in a meth-addled relationship w/ a male prostitute. Ted's followers liked making fun of their leader's "fibs"...

...because they implicitly saw their leader's lies as an act of storytelling in which *they were given a part*: they made it real by believing. Which is how authoritarian populism tricks followers into believing they're being given democratic agency even as they give it away.

I saw same thing in what until Trumpism was most openly fascistic mass movement I'd seen in US, called Battlecry. Tens of thousands of teens screaming for violence for Jesus. Talk to them individually, they cld dissect it w/ irony. What they loved was *embodying* the fantasy.

Go to a Trump rally & you'll hear same. The believer who screams w/ rage as Trump describes "animals" (immigrants) climbing thru windows to rape a (white) "wife" (property), who later says that might be an exaggeration, but "basically" true. This is an act of choosing the lie.

So ok, many Trumpers *choose* the lie, & experience doing so as a kind of creative collaboration. So exposing the lie isn't going to work w/ them, because they're in it *for* the lie. But the political imagination of democracy is also that of creative collaboration...

Fascism flourishes, we know, when power feels threatened. That threat, experienced by power's beneficiaries & many of its victims as grievance, is its water, its sun. But the soil in which it takes root is that which has been parched of political imagination.

To the argument of whether Trumpism is driven by race or class, this way of looking at it says yes--absent class, ever-present racism surges *&* masks itself (to itself, that is) in class. It's a racist virus with multiple means of infection.

(Need to clarify last. Class is of course never absent, but as a nation we've all been complicit in its erasure from mainstream politics. We're good at pretending class is not a thing, or that if it is it's a sentimental thing we routinely transcend.)