



Sarah Churchwell

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17 Apr, 26 tweets, 10 min read



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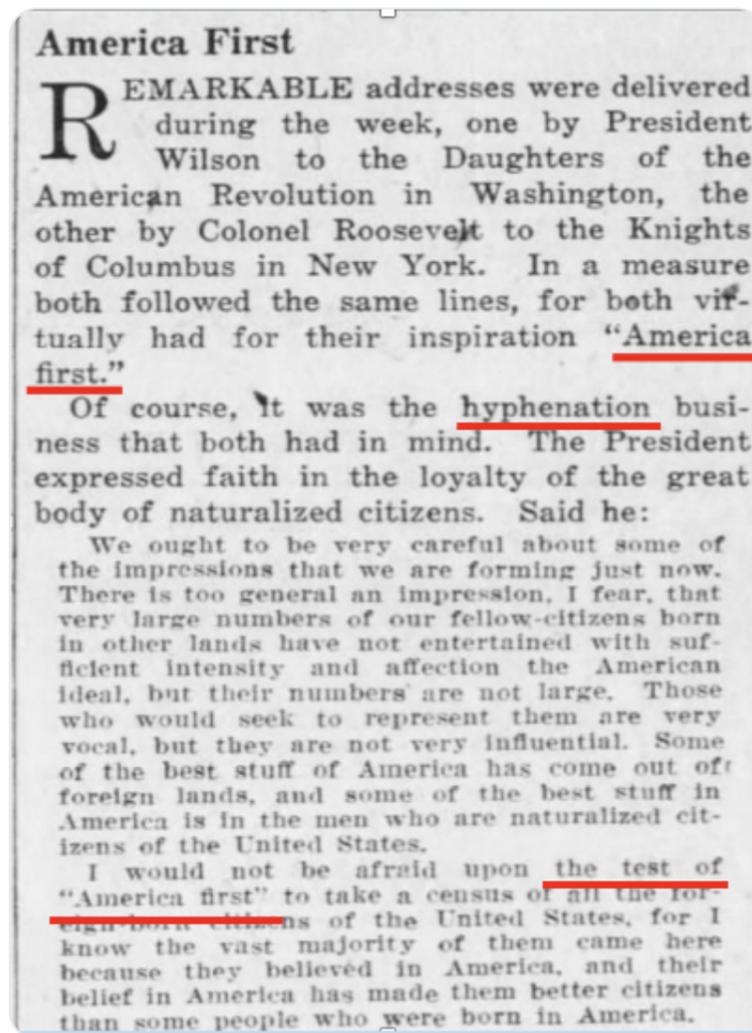
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"America First" movements have been claiming to protect America's uniquely "Anglo-Saxon" identity for a century. A thread.

[washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/...](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/...)

The phrase America First was popularized in 1915, when Woodrow Wilson used it in a speech to the nativist DAR, urging that Americans subject "hyphenate" Americans (German-American, Italian-American, Irish-American) to loyalty tests.



1915 was the same year the second Klan was born, thanks largely to the popularity of The Birth of a Nation, released earlier that year, but also spurred by the lynching of Jewish Leo Frank that summer.

Weird Story That Ku Klux Klan Is Come Back Again

Fifteen Men Said to Have
Sworn Allegiance Once More
to Fiery Cross.

Special To The Knoxville Sentinel.

ATLANTA, Nov. 30.—A weird story has come to Atlanta from Stone Mountain about the revival of the mystic rites of the Klu Klux Klan.

A night or two ago a mysterious yellow flame was seen to burn brightly on the top of Stone Mountain and in the early dawn a number of mysterious figures were seen to come down the mountain side and disappear into the woods.

Investigation disclosed, it is said, that fifteen men had sworn allegiance to the Klan by bowing down before the fiery cross which was so dreaded by carpet-baggers and evil doers in the reconstruction days.

By the early 1920s, America First was a wildly popular slogan, used in the presidential campaigns of 1916, 1920 and 1924. Hearst frequently flew it above his masthead, including as a slogan to keep America out of the League of Nations, and to oppose labor unions.



America First was used to support the explicitly eugenicist anti-immigration bills of the early 1920s, designed to keep people of "lower stock" out of America and protect its supposed "Anglo-Saxon" identity. This speech from 1923 by no coincidence includes "the negro problem."

tributing the sentiments of many immigrants coming to America to information distributed to persons not having the best interests of this nation at heart, and this fact explains to a large extent the deterioration in the quality of our immigrants, and should make use exceedingly tolerant of their delinquencies and shortcomings. "Nevertheless," he continued, "they are here, and constitute a problem which must be reckoned with."

nation at heart, and this fact explains to a large extent the deterioration in the quality of our immigrants, and should make use exceedingly tolerant of their delinquencies and shortcomings. "Nevertheless," he continued, "they are here, and constitute a problem which must be reckoned with."

In discussing the negro problem, Mr. Powell showed the danger to our civilization of amalgamation with inferior races and outlined various methods by which we could attain a real nationhood. Chief of these methods, mentioned by the speaker, is grafting the stock of our culture upon some already existing national root. He discussed the various nationalities represented in America and showed that the Anglo-Saxon root is the only possible one upon which we can engraft our culture, and that, not because the founders of our country were almost exclusively Anglo-Saxon, but because those ideals upon which our republic was based are characteristically and distinctively Anglo-Saxon.

sion of the golden rule. They are the informing spirit of Theodore Roosevelt's 'Square deal,' as of the Declaration of Independence and of Magna Charta. For that reason we should choose to attain the Anglo-Saxon as the basis of our civilization and culture.

"Other means of obtaining nationhood," declared the speaker, "with intelligent limitation of immigration, exclusion of undesirable element, deportation of unworthy immigrants, insistence upon the use of the English language, strengthening of Anglo-Saxon instincts and principles in representatives of our original stock, cultivation of relations of mutual sympathy and understanding with England and other Anglo-Saxon communities and the making of Washington a truly national capital.

At exactly the same time the second Klan had been expanding. It adopted "America First" as its favorite slogan, along with "100% American" (ie, not "hyphenate"). It also didn't like "Negroes" or labor organizers. This is from a Klan march in Louisiana in 1922.

**CROWDS SILENT
AS WHITE ROBED
K. K. K. PARADES**

Ku Klux Klan Marches
Through Streets, Then
Disappears

**FLAMING CROSSES,
FLAG AND BANNERS**

Banners which were carried in the parade were inscribed as follows: "America First," "One Hundred Per Cent American," "White Supremacy," "Duty Without Fear or Favor," "Law and Order Must Prevail," "We Stand for Moral Uplift," "We Are Not Anti Anything Honorable," "Race Purity," "Loafers, Get Busy!" "Officials, Do Your Duty or Quit!" "Good Negroes Are Safe, Bad Ones Beware, Whites Ditto," "Bootleggers, Beware!" "Gamblers Must Leave," "Here 500 Strong," "Abortionists, Beware!"

Here is a Klan recruitment ad, also from 1922, in which they make America First their slogan for the white supremacism (and Christian nationalism) they endorse.

To condemn the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan on the lying evidence manufactured by a desperate enemy—is unfair, un-Christian and un-American!

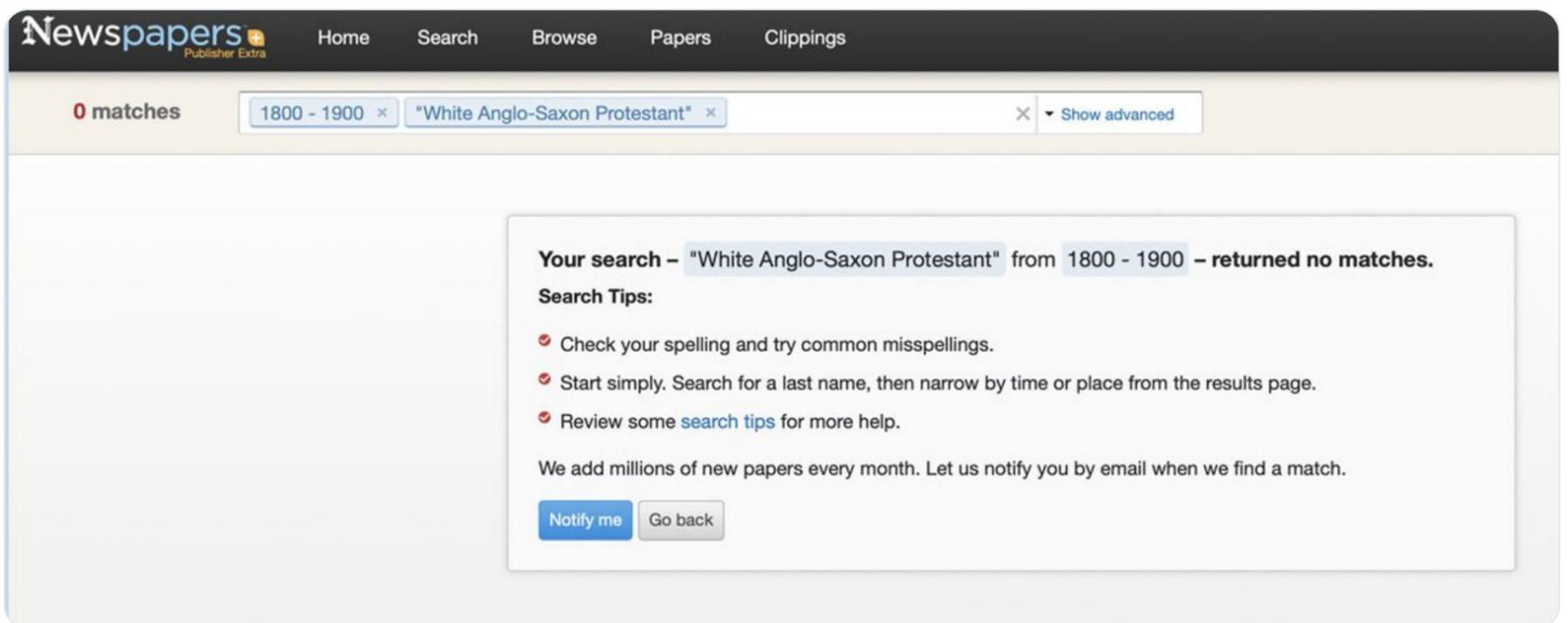
The Ku Klux Klan is the one and only organization composed absolutely and exclusively of ONE HUNDRED PER CENT AMERICANS who place AMERICA FIRST.

Remember that that which is good deserves to live, and that which deserves to live—SHALL LIVE.

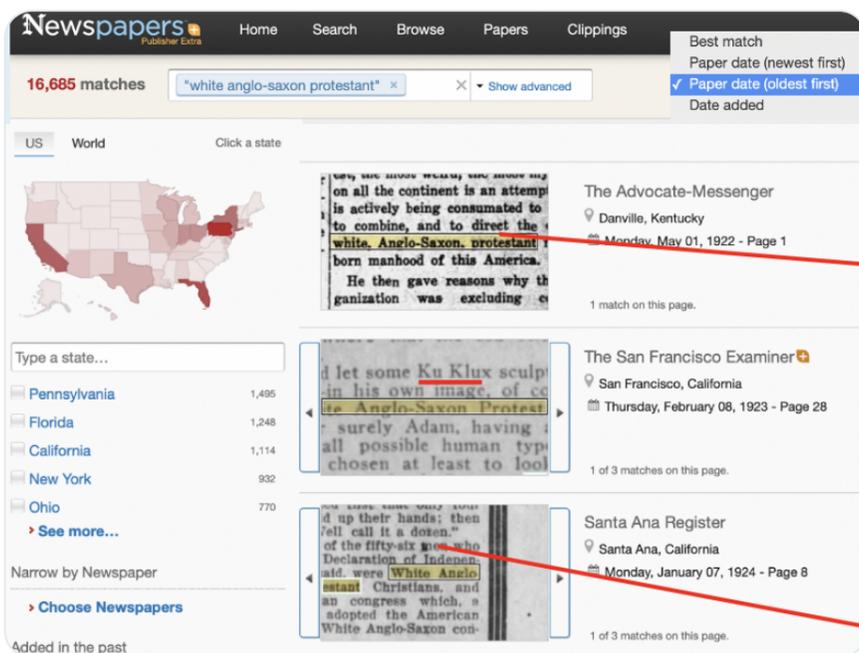
What the Ku Klux Stands For

The tenets of the Christian religion.
White supremacy.
 Closer relationship between capital and American labor.
 Preventing the causes of mob violence and lynchings.
 Preventing unwarranted strikes by foreign labor agitators.

It is also at exactly this moment that "Anglo-Saxon" emerges into the popular American conversation. If you look for "White Anglo-Saxon Protestant" in the American press before 1900, you won't easily find it, because it wasn't used.



But if you look for the first uses of "White Anglo-Saxon Protestant" in the American press in a simple search, guess who pops up with it? That's right, it's the Klan, in the early 1920s.



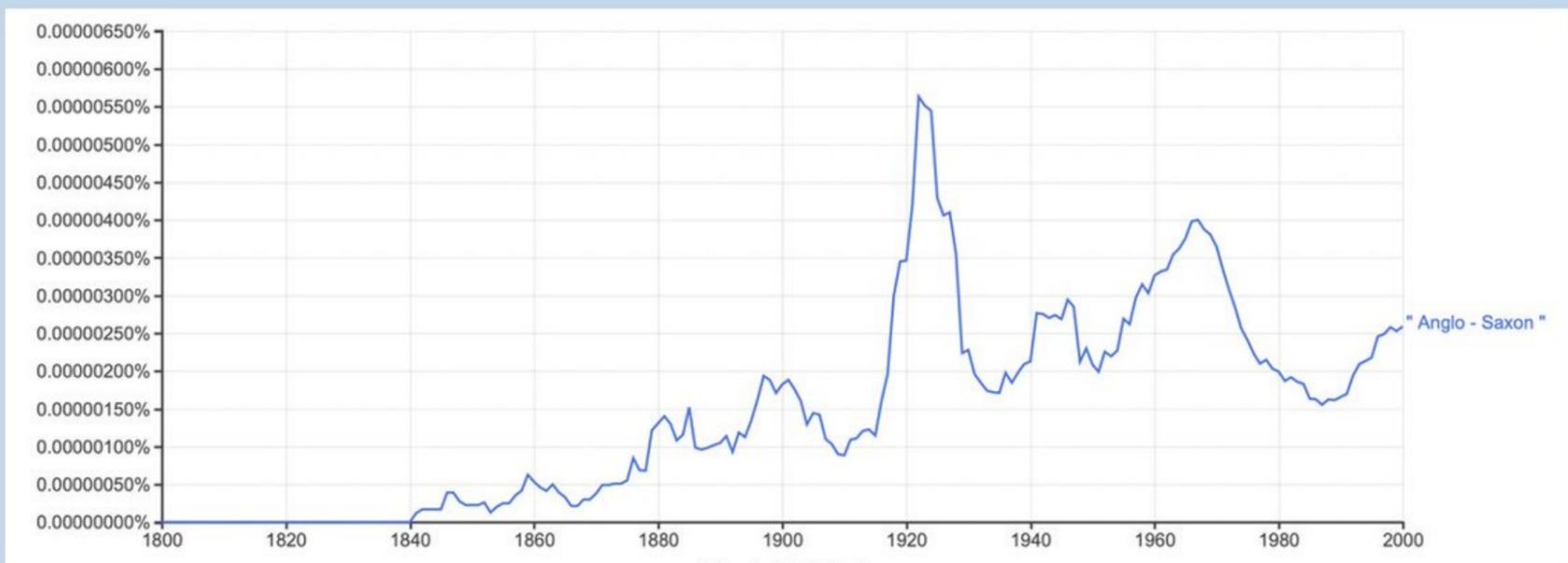
England's rescue. He then entered upon the purposes of the Invisible Order of the Knights of the Klu Klux Klan. The purpose of this fraternity, which Dr. Fowler termed "the strangest, the most weird, the most mystical on all the continent is an attempt that is actively being consummated to elicit, to combine, and to direct the entire white, Anglo-Saxon, protestant native born manhood of this America.

Dr. J. Rush Bronson, who had been previously announced as "Imperial Lecturer for the Klu Klux

reported 219 men present. Dr. Pronson is an able, forceful speaker and his address was a strong plea for true and militant Americanism and Christianity, with emphasis on "White Anglo-Saxon" Americanism and "Protestant" Christianity. Over and over again he declared this to be a "White Anglo-Saxon Christian nation," and in his argument he traced the development of American national life from its inception in the Mayflower contract down through history. He said that every one of the 110 men and women who signed the Mayflower contract was a **White Anglo-Saxon Protestant**. When he asked how many in the audience (229 by actual count) had ever read the Mayflower contract, he announced first that only four persons held up their hands; then he said "Well call it a dozen." Fifty-five of the fifty-six men who signed the Declaration of Independence, he said, were **White Anglo-Saxon Protestant Christians**, and

Google Ngram viewer shows us how the use of "Anglo-Saxon" in American discourse gradually increased over the 19th century (along with the scientific racism it supported), until it explodes in the American corpus in the 1920s.

"Anglo-Saxon" in US discourse 1800-2000



Soon promises to protect America First and the Anglo-Saxon race from hordes of undesirable immigrants and "the negro problem" were everywhere. This is also from 1923, as anti-immigration bills were being passed.

**KLAN IS NOT ANTI;
IT IS PRO-AMERICAN**

(Continued from Page One)

These men were all ready to lay down their lives for the convictions that were dear to them, and the Klansmen stand ready to do as much in the present day. They are not going to stand by and see the country overrun by a set of people from foreign countries that were such a disgrace at home that their governments were glad to see them leave, and were quick to shut the door behind them. They will not stand to have their children inter-marry with those of other races than the Anglo-Saxon race, which has gone down in history as the most progressive and the most civilized of all races.

He stated that the Klan was not against these, but was for America first, and that any of these that might be hit by such a vow was against the Klan in its beliefs that America was the greatest country on earth. In his closing statements he declared that the Pope of the Catholic church would never move to the United States of America as long as the Stars and Stripes floated over the homes of the Ku Klux Klan, and that soon a flag would float from every school house and a Bible would be on every school desk.

I could go on and on; I have written and lectured about this at length. My point is simple. This is not implicit. It is

singing.

If you're interested in more context, I've written more about the invention of supposed "Anglo-Saxon" identities in America here.



White lies matter – Prospect Magazine
The deep—and often surprising—roots of British and American racism
<https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/white-lies-matter-history-blm-black-lives-matter-donald-trump-united-states-st...>

I've written more about the eugenicism of early 1920s anti-immigration restriction, and its associations with America First, here.



American Immigration: A Century of Racism | by Sarah Churchwell | The New York Review of Books
Nativism has never been limited to its most savage enforcers, like the Klan or neo-Nazis. It always has its “civilized” voices, too, with lobbyists, funders, and advocates giving it respectable cover,...
<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2019/09/26/american-immigration-century-racism/>

And finally much of this is covered in my book, Behold, America, which is a history of the phrase "America First." None of this stuff is new. None of it is subtle. Its white supremacism is real, and it is deadly serious.

If you're interested more in how it evolved through the 30s and Lindbergh and the America First Committee of 1940-41, I write about that at length in my book, but also here



American Fascism: It Has Happened Here | by Sarah Churchwell | The New York Review of Books
“When Americans think of dictators they always think of some foreign model,” wrote the anti-fascist journalist Dorothy Thompson in the mid-1930s, but an American dictator would be “one of the boys, an...
https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2020/06/22/american-fascism-it-has-happened-here/?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=NYR%...

And here



The return of American fascism
In 1933 Mussolini Speaks, a “cine-biography of Il Duce,” received its Broadway premiere on 10 March, only five days after the Nazi Party seized control of the Reichstag, and six days after the inaugur...
<https://www.newstatesman.com/international/places/2020/09/return-american-fascism>

And especially here, though it's paywalled.



The plot writes itself: American fascism, in history and counterfactual | TLS
The TLS – Arts – Essay | Dog whistles and a deus ex machina: American fascism, in history and counterfactual, written by Sarah Churchwell
<https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/the-plot-writes-itself-american-fascism-in-history-counterfactual-essay-sarah-churchwell/>

I gave a 10 min explainer video about it here for [@BritishAcademy_](#)

America first and American fascism



I wish these people would stfu so I could talk about something else, frankly. Sadly they're gaining momentum, not losing it.

A few people have queried one of the tweets above & I realize at looking it over that I misspoke, apologies. As this has taken off, I should clarify the tweet below. "Anglo-Saxon" *per se* entered the American conversation much earlier, of course. I meant *this* pop conversation.

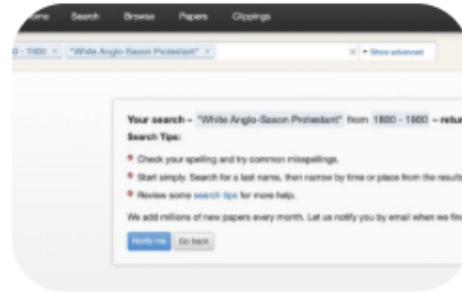


A few people have queried one of the tweets above and I realize at looking it over that I misspoke, apologies. As this has taken off, I should clarify. "Anglo-Saxon" *per se* in the popular American conversation is of course, much older, as I note in the Ngram tweet.



Sarah Churchwell @sarahchur... 4h

It is also at exactly this moment that "Anglo-Saxon" emerges into the popular American conversation. If you look for "White Anglo-Saxon Protestant" in the American press before 1900, you won't easily find it, because it wasn't used.



1 1 5

The history of "Anglo-Saxon" in America is what I wrote about in the Prospect essay I linked to, if you want clarification. Here are a few bits:

Ivanhoe, for example, was inspired by English historian Sharon Turner's popular *History of the Anglo-Saxons*, published between 1799 and 1805, which depicted the English as direct descendants of medieval Saxons.

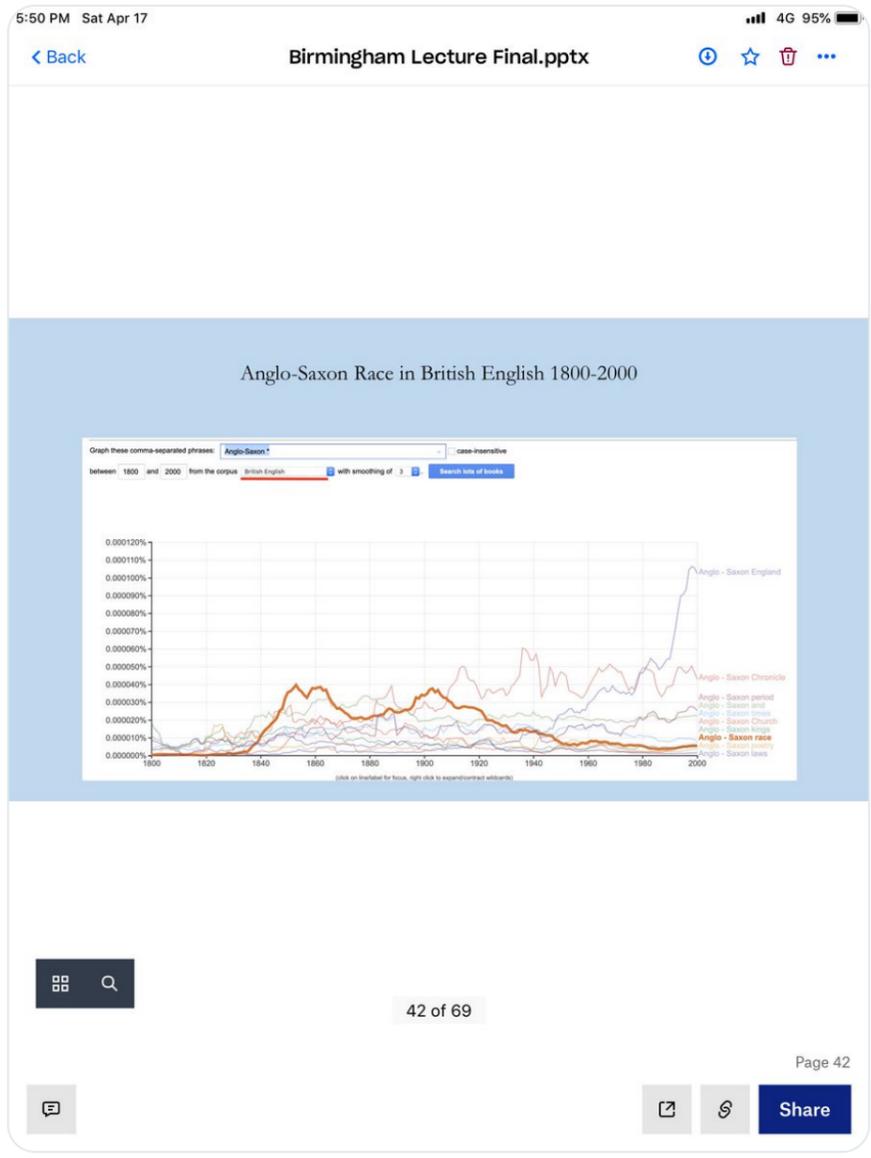
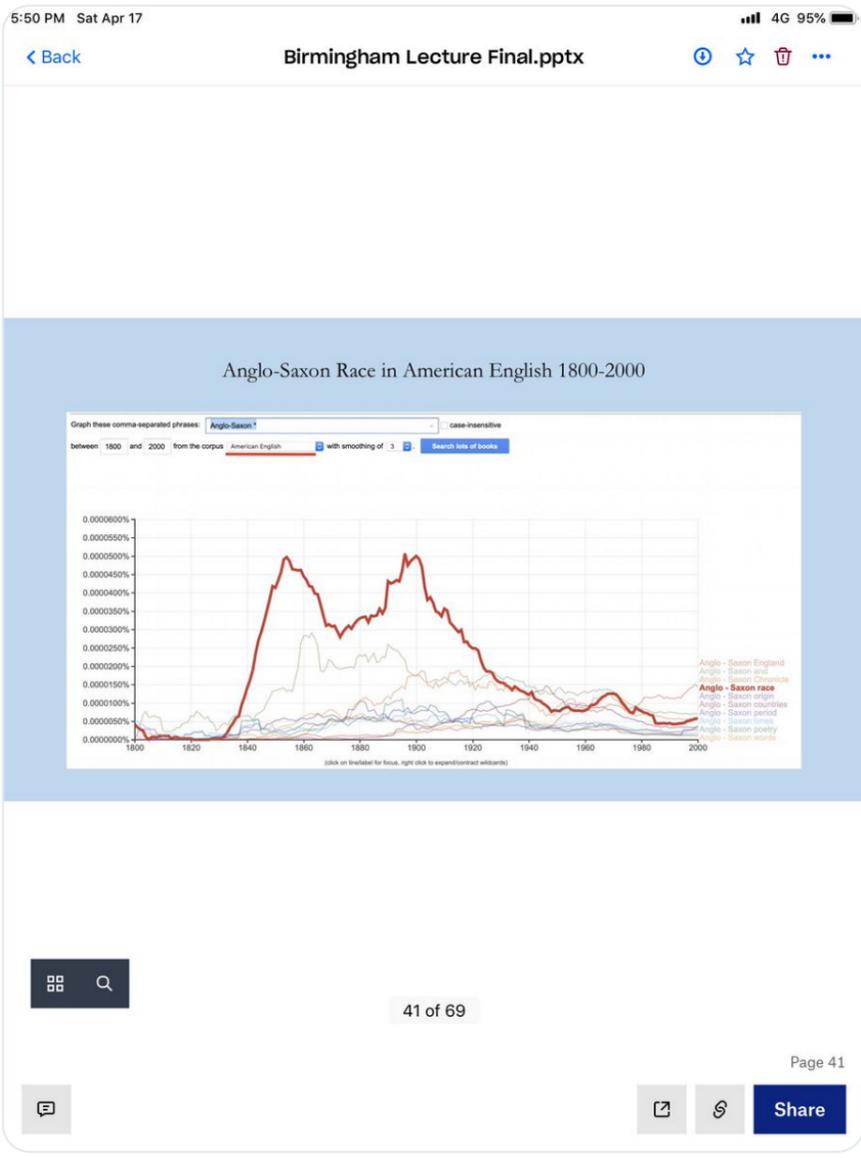
That interest in the Saxons itself can be traced further back to the ideological debates in the 17th and 18th centuries over constitutional monarchism, which claimed from the distant past of Saxon England an "ancient constitution" of heritable liberty that was crushed in 1066 by the conquering "Norman yoke." These legends travelled to the Americas with English colonists in the 17th century, and when the time for America's own insurrection

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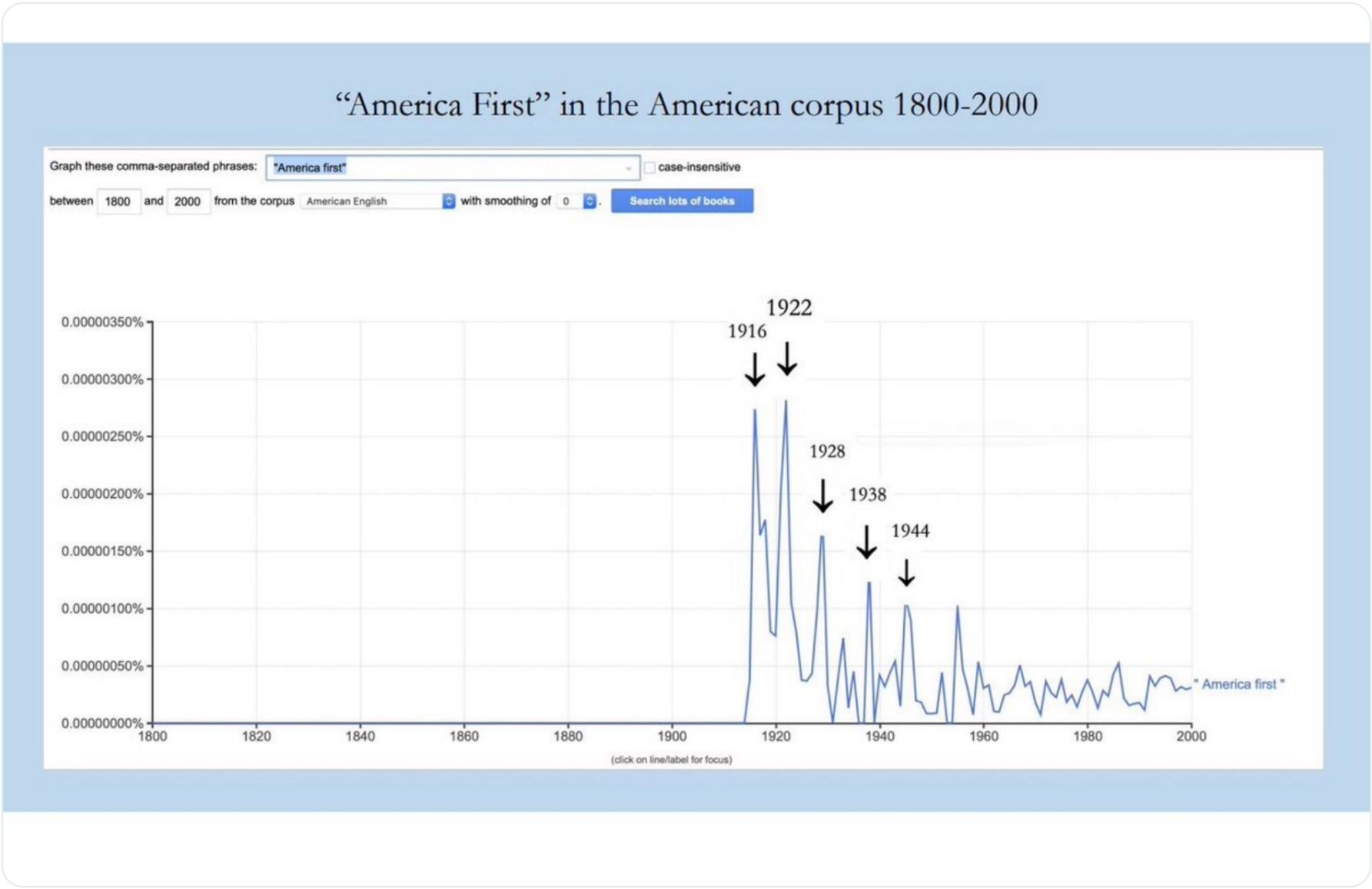
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The "natural" freedom of Anglo-Saxons in the American North also defended, quite easily, chattel slavery in the American South. A Virginia newspaper argued in the same year: "It is peculiar to the character of this Anglo-Saxon race of men to which we belong, that it has never been contented to live in the same country with any other distinct race, upon terms of equality; it has, invariably, when placed in that situation, proceeded to exterminate or enslave the other race in some form or other, or, failing in that, to abandon the country." In other words, don't blame us for slavery and genocide, we're just Anglo-Saxon.

Just for sticking around, some bonus images. Here is a comparison of Anglo-Saxon race in American English and British English over the same period.



Here is America First in the 20th century, (pre Trump).



And lastly sorry for the duplicated tweet but I was having WiFi issues. Will leave it for clarity's sake.

...

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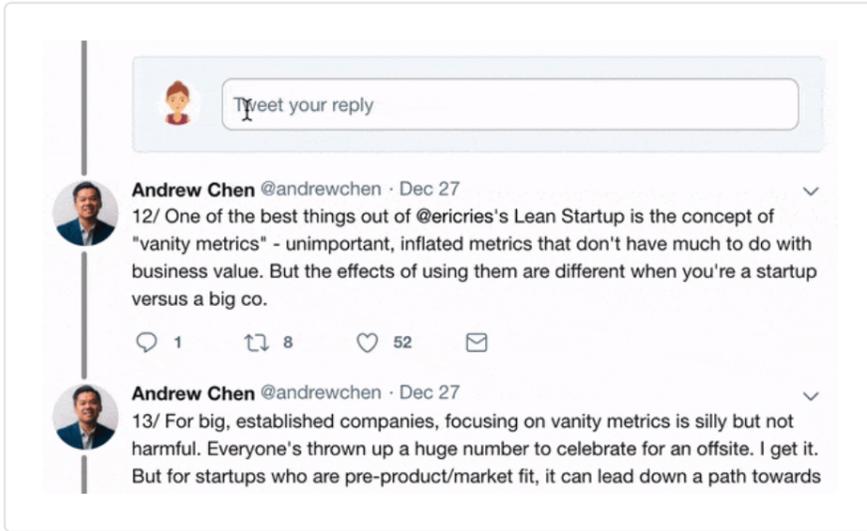
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Sarah Churchwell
[@sarahchurchwell](#)

16 Feb

After it lost the Civil War, and to shore up white supremacy, the white South did not merely put up Confederate statues. It also funded southern history courses taught by white southerners in southern universities, to ensure no opposing interpretations could find their way in.

Not sure what made me think of that right now ... 🤔

For non-UK followers: I was drawing a parallel with a new effort by UK govt to control history and ensure it likes the narrative being told

Read 4 tweets

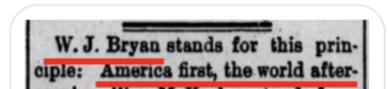


Sarah Churchwell
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27 Jan

[@ClementsAustinJ](#) [@SethCotlar](#) No, I found that it goes back to at least the 1880s, & was popularized by Wilson in 1915 in a speech he gave to the DAR over debates re "hyphenate Americans". I trace all of this in my book on the history of the phrase.

[@ClementsAustinJ](#) [@SethCotlar](#) The first is from 1888. It was used to support William Jennings Bryan in 1896.



Read 7 tweets



Sarah Churchwell
[@sarahchurchwell](#)

10 Jan

A few days ago [@mrjamesob](#) asked me if I felt vindicated bc I've been saying for years that they're fascists. And I realized when I woke up this morning the answer is: I feel angry. Furious. We warned people, using historical evidence, of what was happening.

Now they've come out as fascists and smeared the capitol with feces and bashed a cop's head in and tried to overturn the election and now those fuckers are calling for "unity"?!



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9 Jan

#Fortnums new windows: celebrating London theatre and joy. This is lovely. 🍷





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@sarahchurchwell

28 Sep 20

C4 news tonight leading with data leak from Trump's 2016 campaign database: "a major investigation reveals data leak & evidence that 3.5m Black voters were marked as 'deterrence' in a bid to stop them going to polls."

"In one of biggest database leaks ever" C4 reveals that 3.5 million black voters were targeted in Wisconsin by Trump campaign and other swing states. Clear racist voter suppression.

#C4News have obtained a huge cache of Trump 2016

Read 18 tweets



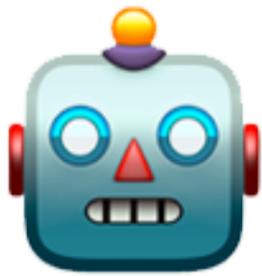
Sarah Churchwell
@sarahchurchwell

24 Sep 20

Happy 124th birthday to Scott Fitzgerald, born #otd in 1896. The best decision of my professional life was to center it around his works and the interwar period he chronicled.



Read 6 tweets



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