While scholarly research exists on its own intellectual merits, we need to recognize that helping unravel the complexity of bigotry and xenophobia assists those working to extend human rights.

The leaders of organized political or social movements sometimes tell their followers that a specific group of ‘Others’ is plotting to destroy civilized society. History tells us that if this message is repeated vividly enough, loudly enough, often enough, and long enough—it is only a matter of time before the bodies from the named scapegoated groups start to turn up.

Levin persuasively argues that both culture and self-interest shape prejudiced ideas and acts of discrimination or violence, which are ‘in many cases, quite rational’. According to Levin, respect for ‘differences can be so costly in a psychologically and material sense that it may actually require rebellious or deviant behavior’, in contrast to the existing norms of a society.  Social science since World War II and the Nazi genocide has shown that under specific conditions, virulent demonization and scapegoating can—and does—create milieus in which the potential for violence is increased. What social science cannot do is predict which individual upon hearing the rhetoric of clear or coded incitement and turn to violence.

In approaching some of these questions, this concluding study will unpack the concepts of ‘constitutive rhetoric’; the vilification, demonization, and scapegoating of a named ‘Other’; coded rhetorical incitement by demagogues; the relationship between conspiracism and apocalyptic aggression; and the process of scripted violence by which a leader need not directly exhort violence to create a constituency that hears a call to take action against the named enemy. It will argue that these processes can and do motivate some individuals to adopt a ‘superhero complex’ which justifies their pre-emptive acts of violence or terrorism to ‘save society’ from imminent threats by named enemies ‘before it is too late’.

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Conclusions

If we assemble the ingredients and processes in this study, we arrive at the following list which traces the linkages from words to violence:

• Pre-existing prejudice or tensions in the society that can be tapped into.

• Intensity of the vilifying language, its distribution to a wide audience, and repetition of message.
• Dualistic division: The world is divided into a good ‘Us’ and a bad ‘Them’.

• Demagoguery. Respected status of speaker or writer, at least within the target audience. A constituency is molded.

• Vilification and Demonizing rhetoric: Our opponents are dangerous, subversive, probably evil, maybe even subhuman.

• Targeting scapegoats: ‘They’ are causing all our troubles—we are blameless.

• The employment of conspiracy theories about the ‘Other’.

• Apocalyptic aggression: Time is running out, and we must act immediately to stave off a cataclysmic event.

• Violence against the named scapegoats by self-invented Superheroes.

Hannah Arendt, in Eichmann in Jerusalem concluded that evil was banal, and that if there was one clear universal truth, it is that ordinary people have a moral obligation to not look away from individual or institutional acts of cruelty or oppression. We recognize the processes that lead from words to violence, they are well-studied, and the theories and proofs are readily available. Silence is consent. Denial is simply evil.
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