

MAY 22, 2022

# The Conspiracy Driving Racial Terror

This is The Weekly Letter for May 22, 2022. [About this newsletter](#)

I'm tweaking the format a bit again this week. The Big Story section will take a look at one topic that's in the news, sometimes including analysis by myself and/or others.

## Big Story

The man who allegedly killed 10 people at a supermarket in Buffalo, NY in an act of racist violence appeared to be motivated by a conspiracy known as the 'great replacement' or 'replacement theory.' [According to](#) an explainer by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), the theory "falsely asserts there is an active, ongoing and covert effort to replace white populations in current white-majority countries."



The 'great replacement' term was coined by French writer Renaud Camus, who focused on migration to France from Africa and the Middle East. The SPLC notes, "The 'great replacement' can also be seen as a variation or elaboration on false narratives of 'white extinction' that have circulated since the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe and in white-majority countries subject to European colonization and settlement." The white extinction narrative was deeply influential, providing some of the impetus for racist policies in the U.S. and Nazi Germany.

The great replacement conspiracy has gone mainstream with far-right media personalities and politicians invoking a version of the conspiracy. SPLC says that Fox News host "[Tucker] Carlson has used the phrase 'great replacement' on air. He seems to otherwise avoid using the terms favored by open white power activists, but he nevertheless regularly portrays everything from immigration at the United States' Southern border to falling birthrates as existential threats to white people." The mainstream version of replacement theory is not identical to the version espoused by self-proclaimed white supremacists, but as SPLC puts it, "The 'great replacement' theory is inherently white supremacist" as well as antisemitic.

A *New York Times* [article](#) discusses the mainstreaming of replacement theory:

"By his own account, the Buffalo suspect, Payton S. Gendron, followed a lonelier path to radicalization, immersing himself in replacement theory and other kinds of racist and antisemitic content easily found on internet forums, and casting Black Americans, like Hispanic immigrants, as 'replacers' of white Americans. Yet in recent months, versions of the same ideas, sanded down and shorn of explicitly anti-Black and antisemitic themes, have become commonplace in the Republican Party — spoken aloud at congressional hearings, echoed in Republican campaign advertisements and embraced by a growing array of right-wing candidates and media personalities."

The *Times* article also notes, "One in three American adults now believe that an effort is underway 'to replace native-born Americans with immigrants for electoral gains,' according to an Associated Press poll released this month."

The alleged Buffalo shooter is only the latest white supremacist terrorist to be inspired by the great replacement conspiracy. In an [opinion piece](#), Jason Stanley notes that the conspiracy also motivated the 2019 massacre in Christchurch, New Zealand, as well as "Norway's Anders Breivik's slaughter of 77 people, including some immigrants, in 2011, Dylann Roof's mass murder of Black churchgoers in Charleston, South Carolina, in 2015, the Tree of Life synagogue killings in 2018, and the murder of 23 people, mostly immigrants, in El Paso, Texas, in 2019."

The great irony of the great replacement theory is that since 1492 it has been white Europeans who have invaded and colonized other parts of the world, replacing local political orders and cultural practices.

A second belief that appears to link the mass shootings in Buffalo, El Paso, and Christchurch is eco-fascism, according to [an article](#) in *The Guardian*. The Buffalo shooter blamed migration for damage to the environment, while the El Paso and Christchurch shooters claimed that their killings were combating overpopulation. Again, there is a deep irony here, given that wealthy Western countries have been the primary perpetrators of environmental destruction.

## Opinion

**Esau McCaulley:** To defeat anti-Black racism, we need to [see the connections](#) between all of its manifestations. (The Atlantic, 5/19)

**John Della Volpe:** Democrats have a path to hold on to the House and Senate—if they can mobilize [young voters](#). (NY Times, 5/16)

**Nicole Curato:** Years of [historical revisionism](#) about the Marcos regime allowed Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. to win the presidential election this month. (The Guardian, 5/18)

## Visual Story

Visualizing the [one million Americans](#) who lost their lives to Covid-19. (Washington Post, 5/12)

## Longform

George Monbiot argues that new knowledge about [soil](#) may provide the key to solving the problem of "how to feed ourselves without destroying the living systems on which we depend." (The Guardian, 5/7)

Have some thoughts about a current event? Want to reply to an opinion article featured in the newsletter? To create a conversation about the news, all are encouraged to share their views. Send your letter along with your name and where you're writing from to [theweeklyletternewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:theweeklyletternewsletter@gmail.com) or reply to this email. Please be aware that the newsletter is published on the website [theweeklyletter.ghost.io](https://theweeklyletter.ghost.io) and sent by email to subscribers. Letters that are hateful or contain misinformation will not be published.



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