

UNITED STATES

What you need to know about the antisemitic ideology behind the Buffalo shooting

BY PHILISSA CRAMER AND RON KAMPEAS MAY 15, 2022



Police on scene at a Tops Friendly Market in Buffalo, New York, after a mass shooting there, May 14, 2022. (John Normile/Getty Images)

(JTA) — The man charged with killing 10 people at a Buffalo, New York, supermarket Saturday allegedly was motivated by a conspiracy theory that has spurred recent deadly attacks on Jews, among others.

An online manifesto attributed to Payton Gendron, 18, explains that the attack was spurred by the theory that a tide of immigrants is crowding out white populations in western countries. The manifesto also says that Jews are the real problem but that “they can be dealt with in time.”

The Tops supermarket, located just a few miles from the Canadian border, was chosen because it is in an area with many Black residents, the manifesto says. Eleven of the 13 people shot there were Black, local law enforcement officials said.

Law enforcement authorities are working to verify that the manifesto was written by Gendron, who was arrested at the scene and later charged with first-degree murder. The U.S. Justice Department is investigating the shooting as “a hate crime and an act of racially motivated violent extremism,” Attorney General Merrick Garland said in a statement.

The baseless theory outlined in the manifesto is known as “Great Replacement” and has united white supremacists across borders in their hatred of Jews and immigrants. Replacement theory has inspired multiple antisemitic and extremist attacks, including the 2018 Pittsburgh synagogue shooting in which 11 Jews were murdered; the 2019 attack on a New Zealand mosque that killed 51; and the 2019 massacre at a Texas Wal-Mart that targeted Hispanic immigrants.

In 2017, white supremacists marching in Charlottesville, Virginia, infamously chanted “Jews will not replace us.”

The manifesto cites the perpetrator of the New Zealand massacre as a chief inspiration and says that its author learned about the dangers of immigration from online research, including on 4chan, a website popular among right-wing trolls.

The theory has gained significant traction in right-wing media and politics. Tucker Carlson, the top-rated Fox News Channel opinion host, has trafficked for more than a year in replacement rhetoric. In one passage in the manifesto allegedly written by Gendron, the writer echoes Carlson’s phrasing in a notorious September 2018 segment, which began, “How precisely is diversity our strength?” The manifesto launches a similar salvo, “Why is diversity said to be our greatest strength?”



Tucker Carlson speaking on Fox News on April 9, 2021. Carlson's comments about immigrants prompted the Anti-Defamation League to call for his firing. (Screenshot)

The Anti-Defamation League called on Fox News to fire Carlson after the host explicitly defended replacement theory on air last year. Fox executives rejected the call.

“Horrified by the #Buffalo shooting which is apparently motivated by #antisemitism and #racism,” ADL CEO Jonathan Greenblatt tweeted Saturday night. “The rhetoric that fuels hate-filled conspiracies has to stop. ... These are the consequences of conspiracies going unchecked.”

Replacement theory has gained currency among some Republican officials, including Rep. Elise Stefanik of New York, whose hometown newspaper in Albany decried her invocation of the theory in an editorial last fall. An Associated Press poll released last week found that half of Republicans in the United States agree at least partially with the idea that there is an intentional effort to crowd white Americans out with immigrants.

Structured largely in a question-and-answer format and accompanied by collected memes and internet citations, the manifesto explicitly states that the author is driven by hatred of Jews.

The author says he departs from many white supremacists in concluding that Jews are, for the most part, white. But, citing pages of quotations from the Talmud, he says Jews are polluted by learning that “they are God’s chosen people and they are permitted to hate and exploit the goyim” or non-Jews, and to engage in pedophilia. (Purported fear of pedophilia is also central to QAnon, another conspiracy theory with antisemitic roots that has gained widespread currency on the American right.)

“Are you an anti-semite? YES!!” the manifesto reads in one place. Later, the author answers the question, “Why attack immigrants when the Jews are the issue?” The answer reads, in part: “They can be dealt with in time.”

The manifesto cites George Soros, the Hungarian-born Jewish billionaire and philanthropist who is a boogeyman for right-wing conspiracy theories, as “majorly responsible for the destruction of our White culture.” It also says that Jews are driving the rise of critical race theory, an academic idea about the ways in which racism is embedded in society that has become a recent rallying cry for right-wing activism.



Users on the gaming site Twitch could watch the 2019 synagogue shooting in Halle as it unfolded. (Getty Images, Twitch/JTA Collage)

The alleged shooter broadcast his attack on Twitch, a streaming platform for video game enthusiasts also used by the man who attacked a synagogue in Halle, Germany, in 2019. That attack broadcast for 35 minutes; Twitch said it had removed footage of the Buffalo attack sooner.

The manifesto says Halle showed the author “that there is enough time to capture everything important.”

The Jewish Federation of Greater Buffalo is among the many local and national organizations providing support to people in the city of approximately 250,000; it is making mental health services available.