

## What is ... GREAT REPLACEMENT THEORY

“Jews will not replace us.”

Shouted during a “Unite the Right” rally  
Charlottesville, VA, August 12, 2017

### What is the great replacement theory?

Simply stated, the great replacement theory (or more simply, replacement theory) refers to the idea that there is an ongoing plot, controlled by progressive elites, that is intended to reduce the influence of white people. Extreme racist adherents of this view believe that Jews are behind the plot, as noted by the chants of marchers during the 2017 “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, VA. More “mainstream” views focus on shifting demographics suggesting that the US will soon be a “majority-minority” country in which white people are in the minority and have less political, economic, and social power. These shifting demographics are often described as the result of two factors. One is Democratic-proposed immigration policies that favor dark-skinned immigrants from countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. The second factor is the assumption that these immigrant groups have higher birth rates than the white population. Taken together, according to replacement theory, the intended purpose is to “import” voters who are likely to vote for Democratic candidates, gradually leading to reduced political power among “traditional” Americans.

### Where does this theory come from?

Two books have been important in the growing prominence of replacement theory. One is the [\*The Turner Diaries\*](#), written by William Pierce and published in 1978 under the pseudonym Andrew Macdonald. The book, a work of fiction, presents the diaries of Earl Turner, a member of a white nationalist army that has the goal of overthrowing the US government along with prominent social institutions including the media and the Hollywood movie industry. The Anti-Defamation League has called *The Turner Diaries* the “Bible of the right wing.” It has been linked to white nationalist organizations operating during the 1980s and 1990s, such as The Order, National Alliance, Aryan Nations and Aryan Republican Army. It has also been described as the inspiration for the 1995 bombing of the Murrah Building in Oklahoma City by Timothy McVeigh.

A second important book is [\*The Great Replacement\*](#) (*Le Grand Remplacement* in French). This book was written by the French author Renaud Camus (who is not related to Albert Camus, the Nobel Laureate philosopher and author) and published in 2011. In the book, Camus presents the view that white native Europeans were being replaced by non-white immigrants from Africa and the Middle East who, he believes, have a higher birth rate than white Europeans. The focus in Camus’ book is mostly on Muslims immigrating to Europe in order to escape war and political instability in their home countries. In the US, this focus has expanded to include immigrants from Latin American and South American countries.

## Why is this important now?

One reason is that it has become a common part of right-wing political narratives about immigration and other topics. For example, Fox News commentator Tucker Carlson has argued that replacement has been the “electoral strategy” of the Democrats since passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, a law that “changed America completely and forever,” according to Mr. Carlson. Click [HERE](#) for his full 17 minute commentary. Similar ideas are being repeated by a collection of conservative politicians and political commentators.

**NOTE:** In his commentary, Mr. Carlson refers to a New York Times editorial titled “We Can Replace Them.” This likely refers to a 2018 editorial, written by Michelle Goldberg, about the campaign for Georgia governor between Brian Kemp, the Republican incumbent, and Stacy Abrams, the Democratic challenger. The editorial does not mention immigration. It does ask every eligible voter to vote. Click [HERE](#) to read the editorial.

Commentary like this works to reframe the political discussion in terms of immigration policy rather than white nationalism or white “replacement.” It “actually introduces the Great Replacement Theory to a conservative audience in an easier-to-swallow pill,” according to Mark Pitcavage, senior fellow at the Anti-Defamation League Center on Extremism (quoted in [The Great Replacement Theory has a long history to America’s past](#)). Related to this, a May, 2022 poll by the [Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research](#) found that almost one-third of adults in the US agree that “a group of people is trying to replace native-born Americans with immigrants for electoral gains.” This gives replacement theory, in the guise of immigration policy, a prominent part in current “culture-war” debates, along with guns, transgender athletes, and critical race theory.

A second, more dangerous, reason is that replacement theory has been linked to racial violence. Believers in replacement theory see themselves in a life-or-death struggle in which violence is justified to prevent “white genocide.” This has come to light as a result of recent mass shootings. A May 2022 story reported by [VOA online](#) reported that shootings in a Buffalo, NY supermarket; an El Paso, TX Walmart; and a Pittsburgh, PA synagogue, along with a Christchurch, New Zealand mosque have all been connected to replacement theory. In each case, the shooter targeted members of a racial minority and referred to replacement theory in online posts. For example, the shooter in El Paso referred to a “Hispanic invasion of Texas.” And the shooter in Buffalo posted a lengthy document online that referred to “an assault on the European people that, if not combated, will ultimately result in the complete racial and cultural replacement of the European people.”

## Where can I learn more?

- David Bauder (2022), Associated Press. [What is “great replacement theory” and how does it fuel racist violence?](#). *PBS Newshour*.
- Josh Kovensky (2019). [How the Great Replacement Theory Went From Extremist Fringe to GOP Mainstream](#). *TPM*.
- Joel Mathis (2022). [Great Replacement Theory](#) Explained. *MSN*.
- *National Immigration Forum* (n.d.). [The ‘Great Replacement Theory’ Explained](#).
- Steve Peoples (2022), Associated Press. [Republican senate candidates promote ‘replacement’ theory](#). *PBS Newshour*.
- Khaleda Rahman (2022). [‘Great Replacement Theory’ has inspired 4 mass shooting in recent years](#). *MSN*.