[**White knight**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1691068/white-knight)

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The writer is a journalist.

PAYTON Gendron did his homework. Before driving over 300 kilometres to the Tops supermarket in Buffalo, New York, he spent months researching and considering suitable targets before settling upon this destination because, in his own words it had “the highest Black percentage that is close enough to where I live”.

He murdered 10 people, almost all of them black, in an attack he livestreamed much like Brenton Tarrant, a white supremacist who murdered 51 people in the 2019 mosque massacre in New Zealand. Like Tarrant, Gendron painted the murder weapon with slogans and symbols.

While Tarrant’s choice of inscriptions put him in the European branch of white supremacy, with references to the Battle of Tours and other historical Christian-Muslim conflicts, Gendron’s choices included racial epithets for black people and the number 14, which carries great significance in American ultra-right circles, referring as it does to the ‘14 words’ of convicted murderer and white supremacist David Eden Lane who wrote: “We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children.”

This 14-word credo is a call to arms for white nationalists who seem to firmly believe that a slow genocide of the white race is being carried out and must be prevented by any means. The number 14 thus is often seen tattooed on the bodies of white nationalists and neo-Nazis. In the latter case, ‘88’ is also used; it’s a reference to Hitler as the eighth letter of the alphabet is ‘H’ and ‘88’ is thus a cipher for ‘HH’ which, in turn, is an abbreviation of ‘Heil Hitler’.

The Great Replacement theory has moved to the mainstream.

If this sounds like a bad joke, rest assured it is deadly serious. As serious as Gendron’s murderous agenda and the painstaking preparations he made before embarking on his genocidal mission.

In the months before the attack, Gendron documented his plans on a private Discord server, uploading details of his purchases of military style helmets, body armour and weapons, his target selection, etc. Gendron had been hauled in for a psychiatric evaluation after making murder-suicide threats in school. He also boasted of how he lied his way through that test and had no problems at all securing military grade weaponry that he later used to carry out this massacre.

Gendron, like many other white terrorists, also penned a rambling 180-page manifesto titled You Wait for a Signal While Your People Wait for You,in which he talks about the ‘Great Replacement’ of white people with a host of other ‘mongrel’ (in the parlance of his ideology) races. This particular theory has been a staple in extremist right-wing circles, and was also the title of Brenton Tarrant’s own manifesto, which he penned in 2019.

The Great Replacement is centred on the thesis that the white race is deliberately being wiped out, a process in which declining Western fertility rates, immigration (legal or illegal) from non-white countries, permissive abortion laws and interracial marriage are all tools that are being used by a global elite, including liberal politicians (the Democratic Party, for example), financiers, and influencers in popular culture, along, of course, with Muslims, under the overall direction of a cabal of powerful Jews. The unspoken assumption here is that, once this is achieved, white people will be treated the same way they have historically treated the ethnic and religious ‘others’.

The details vary from group to group and area to area, but the broad contours remain the same. For example, European extremists like Anders Breivik who massacred 69 people in Norway, referred to the ‘Eurabia’ variant of the overall white genocide theory, of which the Great Replacement theory is an analogue. Most often, terrorists like Gendron, Tarrant (whose writings Gendron shared on his Discord server) and Breivik are written off as ‘lone wolves’, unconnected to formal organisations and hence not considered an existential threat, but this is misleading.

While it is true that these people do not have, or claim, membership of traditional terrorist networks, it is clear that they are all part of the same overall ideological network and provide inspiration to, and are inspired by, each other and often are found citing the same sources, writings and individuals — a process enabled by the ubiquity of the internet and social media forums.

The Great Replacement theory has moved from the fringes to the mainstream, most prominently in America where anchors like Tucker Carlson and Republicans such as Lauren Boebert have increasingly been saying the quiet part out loud, providing a larger audience for, and greater acceptability of, this murderous narrative. With such voices gaining strength, traction and acceptability, the ideological basis for white terrorism is more secure than ever before. All that is needed then is for someone like Payton Gendron to inevitably come around and turn words into action.

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