

Suppressing Insane Ideas Doesn't Stop Insane Conduct

Why did Payton Gendron (allegedly, but he live-streamed it, so it's not like there's much doubt) murder ten people at a Buffalo, New York grocery store on May 14?

The pat, and at least partially correct, answer, is that Gendron subscribes to something called the "Great Replacement" theory. That's mostly what we hear about in mainstream media descriptions of his 180-page "manifesto": He's a "right-wing" racist who believes that political elites are conspiring to replace him and his fellow "white" Americans with people of color.

What most mainstream publications don't do is link directly to the manifesto itself so that members of the public can easily access it, read it, and form our own opinions on its contents. They're telling us what they want us to know about it in the hope that we'll think what they want us to think about it.

I was able to find the manifesto — not via a major US newspaper, but linked from a "white nationalist" publication by a prominent racist writer — after a short search.

On a quick read, the only real conclusion one can reach (other than that a shower sounds like a great idea) is that Gendron is, well, crazy, very much in the Unabomber vein. He's got a bunch of grievances, and for some reason he decided that walking into a store and gunning down a bunch of people was the best way to call those grievances to our attention — and, per the "Great Replacement" stuff, to reduce the non-white population directly, and perhaps indirectly scare other members of that population into leaving the US.

But there's more to Payton Gendron and his grievances than the "Great Replacement." For example, he describes himself as in the "mild-moderate authoritarian left" category politically, complaining that under "conservatism," the "natural environment is industrialized, pulverized and commoditized." Some of his opinions fit comfortably into the 21st century "progressive" mold.

Mainstream media's reluctance to show us the whole sordid thing is self-serving in that sense, but also part and parcel of the notion that "de-platforming" crazy ideas reduces crazy conduct, particularly of the violent sort.

That notion has never worked out in practice. In fact, the opposite seems to be true. For example, the Weimar Republic made liberal (sic) use of anti-hate-speech and "insult" laws to suppress Adolf Hitler's Nazi Party. And the Nazis used that attempted suppression to paint themselves as martyrs and inspire their base to action.

Attempting to suppress Gendron's manifesto doesn't stop those who want to read it

because they'll likely agree with it from finding it. It just makes it harder for the rest of us to engage his terrible ideas and steer the impressionable away from them with better arguments.