

*CBS Mornings*

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7:19:07 a.m. [TEASE]

9 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Ahead; “Replacement Theory”]

TONY DOKOUPIL: Ahead, the Buffalo shooting is drawing attention to the rise of a racist conspiracy theory. How the false idea known as replacement theory caught on in the mainstream.

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7:32:03 a.m.

6 minutes and 51 seconds

GAYLE KING: That Buffalo shooting highlights once again how a once-fringe, racist, and anti-Semitic conspiracy theory is accepted by many Americans. The great replacement theory is a belief that there is a plot to replace white people with people of color. Now, it was first presented among white supremacists and on extremist websites. Now, many conservative politicians and pundits promoting some form of replacement theory.

TUCKER CARLSON [on FNC’s *Tucker Carlson Tonight*, 09/22/21]: This policy is called the great replacement, the replacement of legacy Americans with more obedient people from faraway countries. They brag about it all the time. But if you dare to say it's happening, they will scream with maximum hysteria.

SENATOR RON JOHNSON (R-WI) [on FBN’s *Kudlow*, 04/15/21]: This administration wants complete open borders, and you have to ask yourself why. Is it really they want to remake the demographics of America to ensure they’re — that they stay in power forever? Is that what's happening here?

NEWT GINGRICH [on FBN’s *Mornings with Maria*, 08/04/21]: This is their ideal model is to get rid of the rest of us because we believe in George Washington or we believe in the constitution.

KING: Fox News and Senator Johnson declined our request for comment. On his show, Tucker Carlson defended his claims and is right to express his opinions. Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, who you just saw there, called the white supremacist idea of replacement theory nuts but he did add this: “There is a legitimate cultural — not racial — fight to be had about the degree to which the left seeks to erode American culture and the historic model of assimilation by allowing our legal immigration system to be totally overwhelmed.” Think about that for just a second. Joining us now is Cynthia Miller-Idriss. She’s a professor at American University where she directs the Polarization and Extremism Research and Innovation Lab. She’s also the author of this book; it’s called *Hate in the Homeland: The New Global Far Right*. Good morning to you, Cynthia. There's a lot to unpack here. You know, it’s just been so deeply troubling that a guy so

young could have such hatred in his heart that he would go and do what he did. And this was a fringe theory. But now one in three Americans believe that this is true. How did this happen? I don't know if we can just blame the internet when you see it on TV news.

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Hate in the Homeland; American Univ. Professor Breaks Down Racist Conspiracy Theory]

CYNTHIA MILLER-IDRISS: Absolutely. I mean, it is — it is one of the greatest tragedies I would say to see a theory that should be so fringe and that has been fringe, a false theory —

KING: A false theory, yeah.

MILLER-IDRISS: — a false conspiracy theory that has mobilized terrorists in Oslo and Christchurch, New Zealand, in El Paso, in Pittsburgh, and now in Buffalo. To see that same theory echoed, that same false theory echoed on mainstream news, on — on cable news and to hear Tucker Carlson and politicians that are elected supposed to be the trusted sources of information echo this.

KING: He says he has a right to express his opinion. But doesn't it come with responsibility?

MILLER-IDRISS: Right. There's a right to express an opinion is different from what one should say for — and, you know, what we are in an inclusive democracy and how we move forward together as a nation and it is dangerous and false.

DOKOUPIL: Gayle, I do want to linger on the age of the alleged shooter and his postings online. And apparently he was keeping it all from his parents who were doing their best to try to help him along. They thought he was in school. He — he writes about manipulating their emotions and misleading them about stockpiling weapons. And at one point, he says he wasn't a pure racist or raised racist, in these apparent online writings. How might he have gone from that to killing ten black people in Buffalo?

MILLER-IDRISS: Yeah. Well, one of the things we see online is that there are many different entry points, and where it used to be kind of a destination that you had to seek out to get such hateful propaganda and false conspiracy theories, they're much more likely to come to you online in your ordinary spaces, on a YouTube channel, through an algorithm that recommends a video or in an online gaming chat. They share it in joke forms as memes. It seems less serious. They think it's — you know, it's a — everybody else just doesn't get the joke, gives them a sense of power. And then that opens up gateways. You know, so, it doesn't happen overnight. We do usually see that it takes over a year for somebody to — to typically radicalize, to go down that rabbit hole, to make those choices and I think this is a very textbook case of that.

NATE BURLESON: Do you believe that our youth is more susceptible to the radicalization, some of this misinformation, and may even lead them to actions like this? And if so, what can we do? When should we start having these conversations?

MILLER-IDRISS: Fantastic questions. I mean, we've seen over the last couple years that adults are susceptible to disinformation and propaganda, as well.

BURLESON: Of course.

MILLER-IDRISS: But we do know that youth are more susceptible to the violent outcomes, and they are in a moment in their lives where they're looking for meaning. They're looking for identity. They're looking for belonging, and then when they find it in some of these spaces, it — it can — it can lead to some of these really dangerous outcomes. So, I would say we need digital literacy and media literacy at every age, starting in kindergarten and first grade.

BURLESON: I agree.

MILLER-IDRISS: Right.

KING: Yes.

MILLER-IDRISS: Kids can be taught to understand false content from real content. What's a good source? How can you determine? Also be taught to understand the basics about race and racism in this country, so when you see that kind of propaganda, you recognize it for the false claims that it is.

KING: You know, I now sit here, I'm so afraid. I have a nephew who lives in the Midwest, 20 something, black man, who walks his dog who said I was never afraid to walk my dog. Now I'm in the Midwest, just walking around, minding my own business thinking this could happen at any time. I worry about copycats, I worry about black people thinking they need to retaliate, and I just think we live in such a very frightening time. What troubles you most about this?

MILLER-IDRISS: Yeah. I mean, this is the word terrorism is because it terrorizes, right?

KING: Yes, it's crippling to me.

MILLER-IDRISS: It terrorizes everybody.

KING: Yes.

MILLER-IDRISS: It is crippling. But what I worry about most is that we continue to see this as a problem solely or primarily for law enforcement rather than one that has to be one of education, of treating social work, mental health counselors, understanding the literacy needs, the prop — how to counter propaganda. We cannot ban or arrest our way out of this problem. We really have to start intervening from — you know, from really early ages.

KING: So, what does it mean when we hear the President say this is not who we are, we must condemn this? I hear this and it's — sometimes, it just sounds like white noise to me.

MILLER-IDRISS: Yeah.

KING: We hear this speech over and over and over again.

MILLER-IDRISS: I agree.

BURLESON: Almost like we're numb to it.

KING: Yes, it's — I worry about that, Nate.

MILLER-IDRISS: We are numb to it. I think — and — but when we say things like it's not who we are —

KING: Yes.

MILLER-IDRISS: — it distances the fact that we all have a responsibility —

BURLESON: Right.

MILLER-IDRISS: — to tackle this in our own communities. Parents and caregivers have options. We have a guide ourselves that teaches parents about warning signs in partnership with the Southern Poverty Law Center that, you know, there are things that people can do and if you just think this isn't who we are, it's like washing our hands of the problem.

DOKOUPIL: Yeah.

BURLESON: Yeah. You're right about that and —

DOKOUPIL: We'll put that guide online. We'll link to it for sure.

BURLESON: — yeah.

MILLER-IDRISS: Right, thank you.

BURLESON: And we have to understand we need to lead our youth —

KING: Yes.

BURLESON: — because they are being targeted.

KING: Yeah.

BURLESON: That hate is a seed that can grow into something painful like we saw in Buffalo. Thank you so much, Cynthia Miller-Idriss. We appreciate you.