

# Countering White Nationalism and Antisemitism

## What role do antisemitic conspiracy theories play in White nationalist thinking?

White nationalism is a growing problem in the United States. In particular, the anti-Jewish and racist replacement conspiracy theory has gained notoriety in recent years. This lesson builds on the work of Scholar Sophie Bjork-James and helps our understanding of how conspiracy theories, anti-Jewish hate, and other oppressions are spread through social media and why it is important to combat the spread of these dangerous ideas.

### GOALS

- Participants will understand why the Great Replacement Theory is an antisemitic and racist conspiracy theory.
- Participants will understand that YouTube and social media is a powerful tool in spreading conspiracy theory.
- Participants will explore current immigration myths and facts in the U.S.

### MATERIALS

- “Great Replacement Theory” video, Dr. Sophie Bjork-James  
<https://vimeo.com/784649966/ea162970e8>
- “Understanding the Great Replacement Network: Define America” video  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2spdl5OUj4>
- Appendix A: Immigration Quiz

## LESSON

### *Introduction: 2 minutes*

Overt, explicit racial hate is a growing force within White nationalist movements. White nationalism continues to grow, in part due to fear about the U.S. growing more diverse and social media platforms. Today we will explore the “great replacement” theory and how media including social media is used to recruit and miseducate people to buy into the theory and join White nationalist thinking and movements.

### *Warm-up: 6 minutes*

Take three minutes and discuss with your adult (or a partner) when, from where, and how your ancestors arrived in the United States. Tell a 90-second version of their story, remembering that their being in the U.S. has and continues to impact your life greatly.

### *Discussion: 25 minutes*

We will watch two videos focusing on the conspiracy of the “great replacement” theory. Our first video is from Dr. Sophie Bjork-James who provides foundational information on replacement theory and its antisemitic roots.

Watch “Great Replacement Theory” Dr. Sophie Bjork-James

Before we continue, I want to make sure that we all understand that the “great replacement” theory is an anti-Jewish conspiracy theory, it's a myth based on antisemitic and racist ideas.

- Has anyone heard of the replacement theory before today?
- What does Dr. Bjork-James mean when she talks about diversity being a plus and states that “Increasing racial equality instead of believing that one group will need to be on the top and another group on the bottom” is important for everyone?

# Race, Religion & American Judaism

- Can you think of ways racial diversity in your own life enhances and is a net positive for you? If you do not encounter significant racial diversity in your life, can you think of what you might be missing and how you might be able to increase racial diversity in your life?

In other materials available for you to watch, Dr. Bjork-James talks about how White nationalists recruit people to join their thinking and movement using social media. This next video found on YouTube is about how social media and popular news outlets have been used to spread the “great replacement” conspiracy theory. It is also important to mention that according to the Pew Research Center, 26% of people in the U.S. get their news from YouTube.

Watch “Understanding the Great Replacement Network: Define America”  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2spdl5OUj4>

While this video did not explicitly state it, the replacement conspiracy theory is often tied to antisemitism. Dr. Bjork-James, and many others including a former White nationalist, Derek Black, and Eric K. Ward, a civil rights activist, understand that those who buy into the replacement theory believe Jews are controlling the people moving to the U.S. from other countries. In fact, they argue that antisemitism is THE backbone and central organizing principle for White nationalism.

- What do you think teens your age are hearing about immigration?
- Did the explainer video give you insight into how videos might be used to persuade and manipulate people?
- Do you see parallels in other media platforms you use?
- Why do you think living and thinking about issues of social justice in multiracial and multicultural groups is important?

*Activity: 15 minutes*

Let’s talk about some steps each of us can take to resist this type of hateful thinking. A first step might be for us to understand the facts about immigration. Let’s see how well you do on this quiz about immigration (Appendix A)

[Facilitator may decide to use an online quiz resource like Kahoot! to make it more technology and teen-friendly or break the participants into groups to discuss before having an answer.]

Another step is to make sure that you are thinking about how to make sure your social circle is diverse and that you are being critical viewers and consumers of social media. As talked about in the second video, social media must be a big part of the solution which means you and your friends might already be taking part in the solution. It's easier to do that when we are working in diverse groups and coalitions not only because hate impacts everyone but also because a diverse group of people and experiences really does lead to better thinking and problem solving.

*Closing: 10 minutes*

Thank you each for participating. Antisemitism and hate groups are a tough conversation. I'd like to go around the room and ask each person if you have any unanswered questions right now and, if you do, please share.

[Once shared, thank participants again. Be prepared to say something like, "Many questions will take time to answer and some answers to our questions may never be satisfying" provide resources and remind the youth that their parents are an important resource.]

## Immigration Quiz

1. True or False: Most immigrants are here illegally.

False. Most of the foreign-born people living in the United States followed the rules and have permission to be here

(<http://www.pewhispanic.org/2016/04/19/statistical-portrait-of-the-foreign-born-population-in-the-united-states-key-charts/#2013-fb-authorized-pie>).

Of the more than 43 million foreign-born people who were living in the United States in 2014, around 44 percent were naturalized U.S. citizens . Twenty-five percent of all foreign-born people did not have documentation to be in the U.S. And of those 25% who do not have documents, it is estimated that 40 percent (<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/forty-percent-non-citizens-living-in-us-on-expired-visitor-student-visas/>) came to the country legally. It is known that—by far—the nation with the most visitors who do not leave at the end of their authorized stays is Canada (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/02/03/homeland-security-produces-first-estimate-of-foreign-visitors-to-u-s-who-overstay-deadline-to-leave/>).

2. True or False. It's easy to enter the country legally. My ancestors did; why can't immigrants today?

False. For about the first 100 years, the United States had an "open immigration system (<https://www.uscis.gov/history-and-genealogy/our-history/agency-history/early-american-immigration-policies>) for that allowed any able-bodied immigrant in," according to immigration historian David Reimers. Any White person was eligible to be a citizen of the United States. Back then, the biggest obstacle that would-be immigrants faced was getting here. Some even sold themselves into indentured servitude to do so. Under the current system many ancestors who arrived between 1790 and 1924 would not have met the rigorous process (<https://travel.state.gov/content/visas/en/immigrate/immigrant-process.html>) for obtaining documentation to enter the United States as a resident.

Generally, permission to enter and stay in the country as a documented immigrant is limited to people who are highly trained in a skill that is in short supply, are escaping political persecution, are joining close family already here or are winners of the green-card lottery.

3. True or False: The largest group of incoming immigrants in recent years are from Mexico.

False. While Mexicans make up the largest proportion of immigrants currently living in the US (25%), the majority of immigrants entering the US over the last several years have been from Asia. According to the Migration Policy Institute, 179,800 Indians emigrated to the United States in 2015, making India the top country of origin that year. Next was China, with 143,200 immigrants; Mexico, with 139,400; the Philippines, with 47,500; and Canada, with 46,800. The Pew Research (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/08/20/key-findings-about-u-s-immigrants/>) study in 2018 found 149,000 immigrants from China, 129,000 from India, and 120,000 from Mexico.

4. How many of the 2017 Fortune 500 companies—the largest U.S. companies by revenue—were founded by immigrants or children of immigrants?

- A. About 5%
- B. About 25%
- C. About 50%
- D. 80%

C. According to the Center for American Entrepreneurship, 43 percent of the companies listed on the 2017 edition of the Fortune 500 were founded by immigrants or children of immigrants. The proportion among the twenty-five largest firms—52 percent—was even higher. Examples range from Amazon, Apple, and Google to McDonald's and AT&T.

5. True or False. Immigration increases crime and violence.

False. Immigrants come to this country for a few primary reasons: to work, to be reunited with family members or to escape a dangerous situation. Most are couples, families with children, and workers who are integral to the U.S. economy. Statistics show that immigrants are less likely to commit serious crimes. This holds true for immigrants who are documented and undocumented, regardless of their country of origin or level of education. In other words, the overwhelming majority of immigrants are not “criminals.”

According to the American Immigration Council: “Between 1990 and 2013 (<https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/criminalization-immigration-united-states>) the foreign-born share of the U.S. population grew from 7.9 percent to 13.1 percent and the number of unauthorized immigrants more than tripled. ... During the same period, FBI data indicate that the violent crime rate and property crime rate declined 48 percent ... [and] 41 percent [respectively].”

“In Texas (<https://www.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/2020-10/working-paper-60.pdf>) [the only state that specifically tracks immigration status in its crime reporting statistics], in 2018, the illegal immigrant criminal conviction rate was 782 per 100,000 illegal immigrants, 535 per 100,000 legal immigrants, and 1,422 per 100,000 native-born Americans.”

6. True or False: Undocumented immigrants don’t pay taxes and burden the national economy.

False. Immigrants who are undocumented pay taxes every time they buy taxable goods such as gas, clothes or new appliances (depending on where they reside). They also contribute to property taxes—a main source of school funding—when they buy or rent a house or apartment. A 2017 report ([http://itep.org/itep\\_reports/2017/03/undocumented-immigrants-state-local-tax-contributions-2.php](http://itep.org/itep_reports/2017/03/undocumented-immigrants-state-local-tax-contributions-2.php)) from the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy highlights that undocumented immigrants pay an estimated \$11.74 billion in state and local taxes a year.

The U.S. Social Security Administration estimated that in 2010 undocumented immigrants—and their employers—paid \$13 billion in payroll taxes ([https://www.ssa.gov/oact/NOTES/pdf\\_notes/note151.pdf](https://www.ssa.gov/oact/NOTES/pdf_notes/note151.pdf)) alone for benefits they will never get. They can receive schooling and emergency medical care but not welfare or food stamps.

7. True or False. Current immigration laws in the United States separate families.

True. Since the start of the recession in 2008, the number of immigrants without documentation coming into the country has fallen each year and, in more recent years, the number has stabilized (<http://www.pewhispanic.org/2016/09/20/overall-number-of-u-s-unauthorized-immigrants-holds-steady-since-2009>). Many people claim that immigrants have “anchor babies”—an offensive term for giving birth to children in the United States so that the whole family can stay in the country (and a narrative that contributes to the myth that the immigrant population is exploding).

According to the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, a child born on U.S. soil is automatically a U.S. citizen. However, immigration judges will not keep immigrant parents in the United States just because their children are U.S. citizens. The vast majority of the 4 million immigrant adults (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/21/unauthorized-immigrant-population-stable-for-half-a-decade>) without documentation who live with their children who were born in the United States have no protection from deportation.

Sources:

<https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/spring-2011/ten-myths-about-immigration>

<https://www.cfr.org/quiz/see-how-much-you-know-about-immigration-united-states>