

Charleston church shooting

“2015 Charleston shooting” redirects here. For the shooting by a North Charleston police officer, see [Shooting of Walter Scott](#).

The **Charleston church shooting** (also known as the **Charleston church massacre**^{[5][6][7]}) was a mass shooting that took place at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in downtown Charleston, South Carolina, United States, on the evening of June 17, 2015. During a prayer service, nine people were killed by a gunman, including the senior pastor, state senator Clementa C. Pinckney; a tenth victim survived. The morning after the attack, police arrested a suspect, later identified as 21-year-old Dylann Roof, in Shelby, North Carolina. Roof later confessed that he committed the shooting in hopes of igniting a race war.

The United States Department of Justice investigated whether the shooting was a hate crime or an act of domestic terrorism, eventually indicting Roof on 33 federal hate crime charges. Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church is one of the United States' oldest black churches and has long been a site for community organization around civil rights. Roof is to be indicted on federal hate crime charges, and has been charged with nine counts of murder by the State of South Carolina. If convicted, he could face a sentence of death or thirty years to life in prison. A website apparently published by Roof included a manifesto detailing his beliefs on race, as well as several photographs showing him posing with emblems associated with white supremacy. Roof's photos of the Confederate battle flag triggered debate on its modern display.

1 Background

The 199-year-old church has played an important role in the history of South Carolina, including the slavery era, the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, and the Black Lives Matter movement in the 2010s.^[8] The church was founded in 1816 and it is the oldest African Methodist Episcopal Church in the South, often referred to as “Mother Emanuel”.^{[9][10]} It is the oldest historically black congregation south of Baltimore. When one of the church's co-founders, Denmark Vesey, was suspected of planning a slave rebellion in Charleston in 1822, 35 people, including Vesey, were hanged and the church was burned down.^{[11][12]} Charleston citizens accepted the claim that a slave rebellion was to begin at the stroke of

midnight on June 16, 1822, and to erupt the following day; the shooting in 2015 occurred on the 193rd anniversary of the thwarted uprising.^[13] The rebuilt church was formally shuttered with other all-black congregations by the city in 1834, meeting in secret until 1865 when it was formally reorganized, acquired the name Emanuel (“God with us”),^[14] and rebuilt upon a design by Denmark Vesey's son.^[13] That structure was badly damaged in the 1886 Charleston earthquake.^{[15][16]} The current building dates from 1891.^{[13][14]}

The church's senior pastor, the Rev. Clementa C. Pinckney, had held rallies after the shooting of Walter Scott by a white police officer on April 4, 2015, in nearby North Charleston, and as a state senator, he pushed for legislation requiring police to wear body cameras.^[17] Several observers noted a similarity between the massacre at Emanuel AME and the 1963 bombing of a politically active African-American church in Birmingham, Alabama, where the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) killed four black girls and injured fourteen others, an attack that galvanized the 1960s Civil Rights Movement.^{[16][18]}

A number of scholars, journalists, activists and politicians have emphasized the need to understand the attack in the broader context of racism in the United States, rather than seeing it as an isolated event of racially motivated violence. In 1996, Congress passed the Church Arson Prevention Act, making it a federal crime to damage religious property because of its “racial or ethnic character”, in response to a spate of 154 suspicious church burnings since 1991.^{[19][20]} More recent arson attacks against black churches included a black church in Massachusetts that was burned down the day after President Barack Obama was inaugurated in 2009.^{[21][22][23][24]}

2 Shooting

At around 9:05 p.m. EDT on Wednesday, June 17, 2015, the Charleston Police Department responded to calls of a shooting at Emanuel AME Church.^[11] A man described as white, with sandy-blond hair, around 21 years old and 5 feet 9 inches (175 cm) in height, wearing a gray sweatshirt and jeans, opened fire with a Glock 41 .45-caliber handgun^[25] on a group of people inside the church at a Bible study attended by Pinckney. The shooter then fled the scene.^{[26][27][28]} He had been carrying eight magazines holding hollow-point bullets, which are designed to inflict maximum damage.^[29] This was the largest mass shooting at an American place of worship, alongside a 1991 attack

at a Buddhist temple in Waddell, Arizona.^[30]

During the hour preceding the attack, 13 people including the shooter participated in the Bible study.^[31] According to the accounts of people who talked to survivors, the shooter asked for Pinckney and sat down next to him, initially listening to others during the study. He started to disagree when they began discussing Scripture. Eventually, after waiting for the other participants to begin praying,^[32] he stood up and pulled a gun from a fanny pack,^[28] aiming it at 87-year-old Susie Jackson. Jackson's nephew, 26-year-old Tywanza Sanders, tried to talk him down and asked him why he was attacking churchgoers. The shooter responded, "I have to do it. You rape our women and you're taking over our country. And you have to go." When he expressed his intention to shoot everyone, Sanders dove in front of Jackson and was shot first. The suspect then shot the other victims, all the while shouting racial epithets. He also reportedly said, "Y'all want something to pray about? I'll give you something to pray about."^[33] He reloaded his gun five times. Sanders' mother and his five-year-old niece, both attending the study, survived the shooting by pretending to be dead.^{[34][35][36]}

Dot Scott, president of the local branch of the NAACP, said she had heard from victims' relatives that the shooter spared one woman (Sanders' mother)^[37] so she could, according to him, tell other people what happened.^[38] He asked her, "Did I shoot you?" She replied, "No." Then, he said, "Good, 'cause we need someone to survive, because I'm gonna shoot myself, and you'll be the only survivor."^[39] According to the son of one of the victims, who spoke to that survivor, the shooter allegedly turned the gun to his own head and pulled the trigger, but only then discovered he was out of ammunition.^[40] Before leaving the church, he reportedly "uttered a racially inflammatory statement" over the victims' bodies.^[28]

Several hours later, a bomb threat was called into the Courtyard by Marriott hotel on Calhoun Street, complicating the investigation and prompting an evacuation of the immediate area.^{[11][41]}

2.1 Victims

The dead, six women and three men, were all African American. Eight died at the scene; the ninth, Daniel Simmons, died at MUSC Medical Center.^[42] They were all killed by multiple gunshots fired at close range.^{[36][43]} One unidentified person was wounded but survived. Five individuals survived the shooting unharmed, including Felicia Sanders, mother of slain victim Tywanza Sanders, and her five-year-old granddaughter, along with Polly Sheppard, a Bible study member. Pinckney's wife and daughter were also inside the building during the shooting.^{[3][44]} Those killed were identified as:^{[45][46]}

- Cynthia Marie Graham Hurd (54) – Bible study

member and manager for the Charleston County Public Library system; sister of Malcolm Graham

- Susie Jackson (87) – a Bible study and church choir member
- Ethel Lee Lance (70) – the church's sexton
- Depayne Middleton-Doctor (49) – a pastor who was also employed as a school administrator and admissions coordinator at Southern Wesleyan University
- Clementa C. Pinckney (41) – the church's pastor and a South Carolina state senator
- Tywanza Sanders (26) – a Bible study member; grandnephew of Susie Jackson
- Daniel Simmons (74) – a pastor who also served at Greater Zion AME Church in Awendaw
- Sharonda Coleman-Singleton (45) – a pastor; also a speech therapist and track coach at Goose Creek High School
- Myra Thompson (59) – a Bible study teacher

3 Suspect

Main article: Dylann Roof

Dylann Storm Roof^[47] was named by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) as the suspected killer after his father and uncle contacted police to positively identify him upon seeing security photos of him in the news.^[48] Roof was born in Columbia, South Carolina, and was living in largely African-American Eastover at the time of the attack.^[36] Roof had a prior police record consisting of two arrests, both made in the months preceding the attack.^{[49][50]} According to FBI Director James Comey, a police report detailing Roof's admission to a narcotics offense should have prevented him from purchasing the weapon used in the shooting, but an administrative error within the National Instant Criminal Background Check System kept Roof's admission (though not the arrest itself) from appearing on his mandatory background check.^{[51][52]}

One image from his Facebook page depicts Roof wearing a jacket decorated with two emblems that are popular among American white supremacists: the flags of the former Rhodesia (now known as Zimbabwe) and apartheid-era South Africa.^{[53][54][55]} Roof reportedly told friends and neighbors of his plans to kill people, including a plot to attack the College of Charleston, but his claims were not taken seriously.^{[56][57]} On June 20, a website was discovered called *The Last Rhodesian* (www.lastrhodesian.com); it had been registered to a "Dylann

Roof” on February 9, 2015.^{[58][59][60]} The website included what appeared to be an unsigned manifesto containing Roof’s opinions of “Blacks”, “Jews”, “Hispanics” and “East Asians”,^{[61][62]} as well a cache of photos, including an image of Roof posing with a handgun and a *Confederate Battle Flag*.^[59] In this manifesto, Roof says he became “racially aware” as a result of the 2012 shooting of Trayvon Martin, writing that because he kept hearing people talk about the incident, he “decided to look him up” and read the *Wikipedia* article about it. He concluded that *George Zimmerman* had been in the right, and he was unable to comprehend why the case had gained national attention. He then searched for “black on White [*sic*] crime” on Google and found the website of the *Council of Conservative Citizens*, where he read “pages upon pages” of cases involving black people murdering white people. Roof then writes he has “never been the same since that day”.^[60]

According to web server logs, Roof’s website was last modified at 4:44 p.m. on June 17, the day of the shooting, when Roof noted, “[A]t the time of writing I am in a great hurry.”^[59]

An unidentified source said interrogations with Roof after his arrest determined he had been planning the attack for around six months, researched Emanuel AME Church, and targeted it because of its role in African-American history.^[28] One of the friends who briefly hid Roof’s gun from him said, “I don’t think the church was his primary target because he told us he was going for the school. But I think he couldn’t get into the school because of the security ... so I think he just settled for the church.”^{[63][64]}

Roof’s cellphone and computer were seized and subjected to FBI analysis. According to unnamed officials, he was in online communication with other white supremacists, and although they did not appear to have encouraged the massacre,^[65] the investigation was said to have widened to include other persons of interest.^[66]

4 Criminal investigation

4.1 Manhunt and capture

The attack was treated as a hate crime by police, and officials from the FBI were called in to assist in the investigation and manhunt.^[27]

At 10:44 a.m., on the morning after the attack, Roof was captured in a traffic stop in Shelby, North Carolina, approximately 245 miles (394 km) from the shooting scene. A .45-caliber pistol was found in the car during the arrest, though it was not immediately clear if it was the same one used in the attack.^{[67][68]} Police received a tip-off from a woman who recognized Roof driving his car, a black Hyundai Elantra with South Carolina license plates and a three-flag “Confederate States of America” bumper decoration,^{[69][70]} on U.S. Route 74, recalling security

camera images taken at the church and distributed to the media. She later recalled, “I got closer and saw that haircut. I was nervous. I had the worst feeling. Is that him or not him?” She called her employer, who contacted local police, and then tailed the suspect’s car for 35 miles (56 km) until she was certain authorities were moving in for an arrest.^[71]

4.2 Legal proceedings

Roof waived his extradition rights and was flown to Sheriff Al Cannon Detention Center in North Charleston on the evening of June 18.^{[35][72][73]} At the jail, his cell-block neighbor was Michael Slager, the former North Charleston police officer charged with murder after he shot Walter Scott.^{[74][75]} According to unconfirmed reports, Roof confessed to committing the attack and said his purpose was to start a race war.^[34] He reportedly told investigators he almost did not go through with his mission because members of the church study group had been so nice to him.^[33]

On June 19, Roof was charged with nine counts of murder and one count of possession of a firearm during the commission of a violent crime.^{[73][76]} He first appeared in Charleston County court via videoconference at a bond hearing later that day. At the hearing, shooting survivors and relatives of five of the victims spoke to Roof directly, saying that they were “praying for his soul” and forgave him.^{[28][77][78][79]}

The judge, Charleston County chief magistrate James “Skip” Gosnell, Jr., caused controversy at the bond hearing with his statement that, alongside the dead victims and their families, “there are victims on this young man’s side of the family [...] Nobody would have ever thrown them into the whirlwind of events that they are being thrown into.”^[80] In 2005, the South Carolina Supreme Court reprimanded Gosnell for using a racial slur while on the bench in 2003.^[81] Gosnell set a \$1 million bond for the weapons possession charge and no bail on the nine counts of murder.^[82]

Governor Nikki Haley has called on prosecutors to seek the death penalty against Roof.^[83]

On July 7, Roof was indicted on the nine murder charges and the weapons charge, as well three new charges of attempted murder, one for each person who survived the shooting.^{[84][85]} His trial is scheduled to start on July 11, 2016.^[86] He also faces federal hate crime charges.^[87]

On July 31, Roof pleaded not guilty to the federal charges against him on the advice of his lawyer David Bruck. Bruck earlier said Roof wanted to plead guilty, but he couldn’t advise it without knowing the government’s intentions.^{[88][89]}

On September 3, it was announced that Roof will face the federal death penalty, with the decision being made since more than two people were killed in the shooting

and others' lives were put at risk.^[90] On September 16, Roof said through his attorney that he was willing to plead guilty in exchange for a sentence of life in prison without parole.^[91] On October 1, the trial was pushed back to at least January 2016 to give prosecutors and Roof's attorneys more time to prepare.^[92]

5 Aftermath



A prayer vigil at Morris Brown African Methodist Episcopal Church

5.1 Context of racism

Heidi Beirich, the director of the Intelligence Project for the **Southern Poverty Law Center**, a non-profit that maintains an online list of its designated **American hate groups**, said the gunman's reported self-declared motivation reflected a major topic on white supremacist websites, which are preoccupied with the idea that "whites are being hugely victimized by blacks and no one is paying attention." In particular, the shooter's reported claim that "you rape our women" ties into a long history of violence against blacks in the name of white womanhood; Beirich said, "[Black men sexually assaulting white women] is probably the oldest racist trope we have in the U.S."^{[93][94]} According to her, it was a particularly effective trope because of the way white femininity has historically been viewed and positioned. Lisa Lindquist-Dorr, associate professor at the **University of Alabama**, explained the myth of black rapists that dominated white, Southern culture, saying, "Sexual access to women is a trophy of power, white women embodied virtue and morality, they signified whiteness and white superiority, so sexual access to white women was possessing the ultimate privilege that white men held. It makes women trophies to be traded among men."^[95]

Jamelle Bouie itemized for *Slate*, "Make any list of anti-black terrorism in the United States, and you'll also have a list of attacks justified by the specter of black rape." The Tulsa race riot of 1921, the Rosewood massacre of 1923, and the murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till in 1955 were cited as examples.^[96] Beirich said it was unclear at that point in the investigation whether the suspect had

any connection to hate groups, but such groups have been growing over the past decade, and "for several years South Carolina has been the place with the highest density of hate groups."^[97]

5.2 Memorials

At Morris Brown African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, numerous people of different races and religions attended a ceremony commemorating the victims and proclaimed that the attack would not divide the community.^[35] Another such ceremony occurred at the TD Arena in the **College of Charleston**.^[43] On June 21, four days after the shooting, Emanuel AME Church reopened for its Sunday worship service.^[98] The Rev. Dr. Norvel Goff Sr., Presiding Elder of Emanuel AME Church, delivered the sermon.^[99]

On June 25, 2015, at Emanuel AME Church, funerals were held for victims Ethel Lance and Sharonda Coleman-Singleton and attended by several political figures and civil rights leaders.^[18] Clementa Pinckney's funeral was held in the basketball arena of the College of Charleston on June 26, 2015, with President Barack Obama delivering the eulogy.^[100] Earlier, Pinckney's body lay in state in the South Carolina statehouse.^[101] This was followed by the funerals of Tywanza Sanders, Susie Jackson, and Cynthia Graham Hurd the next day.^[102] Hurd's family announced that they are establishing the Cynthia Graham Hurd Fund for Reading and Literacy organization in her memory; it is expected to give children easier access to books.^[103] By July 2, the last of the victims, Daniel Simmons, was buried.^[104]

5.3 Community response

There has been some criticism aimed towards the community's forgiving, peaceful response to Roof and the shooting.^[105]

The **Black Lives Matter** movement has protested the shooting.^[106]

Questions were raised about the security of black churches (as well as churches in general) and their long-standing practice of welcoming anyone willing to pray. Roof, a stranger to churchgoers, was easily able to enter Emanuel AME Church with no questions being asked. In the weeks after the shooting, AME Church leaders distributed a document titled "12 Considerations for Congregational Security", which recommended creating security plans and teams for black churches, improving communications, developing relationships with local law enforcement, and securing and monitoring all entrances and exits to churches. Some churches considered implementing armed security and metal detectors, but conversation for these steps have currently not gained traction.^[107]

5.4 Other investigations

The FBI is investigating possible church arson after several black churches burned down in one week's time following the shooting.^{[108][109]} On July 3, *Time* reported that the investigation concluded the fires were unrelated.^[110]

The FBI is undergoing a 30-day review to examine the lapses in the background-check system that allowed the suspected shooter to legally purchase the gun used in the shooting.^[51] According to James Comey, Roof had been arrested in March on a felony drug charge, which would have required an inquiry into the charge during the background check examination. However, he was actually arrested on a misdemeanor drug charge, which was incorrectly written as a felony at first due to a data entry error made by a jail clerk. The mistake was noticed by the jail two days after the arrest, but the change was not made. The FBI agent conducting the background check examination then called the wrong agency while making the inquiry of the drug charge, due to having limited information on law enforcement agencies in Lexington County. This subsequently allowed Roof to make the purchase. However, despite the misdemeanor charge, he still would not have been able to purchase the gun under a law that barred "unlawful user[s] of or addicted to any controlled substance" from owning firearms.^{[111][112][113]}

On September 17, one of the friends who briefly hid Roof's gun away from him was arrested, reportedly for lying to federal authorities during their investigation and failing to report a crime. The next day, he pleaded not guilty to one count of making false statements to federal investigators and one count of concealing knowledge about a crime. He faces a maximum of nine years in prison and a \$500,000 fine. According to legal experts, prosecutors possibly intend to use the prospect of federal charges against him as leverage for testifying against Roof.^{[114][115][116]}

6 Reactions

6.1 Officials

Charleston Mayor Joseph P. Riley, Jr. denounced the attack and said, "Of all cities, in Charleston, to have a horrible hateful person go into the church and kill people there to pray and worship with each other is something that is beyond any comprehension and is not explained. We are going to put our arms around that church and that church family."

South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley said, "While we do not yet know all of the details, we do know that we'll never understand what motivates anyone to enter one of our places of worship and take the life of another. Please join us in lifting up the victims and their families with our

love and prayers."^[117]

President Barack Obama said in Charleston on June 18, "Once again, innocent people were killed in part because someone who wanted to inflict harm had no trouble getting their hands on a gun... We as a country will have to reckon with the fact that this type of mass violence does not happen in other advanced countries."^[118] At a Washington press conference later that day, he said, "Michelle and I know several members of Emanuel AME Church. We knew their pastor, Reverend Clementa Pinckney, who, along with eight others, gathered in prayer and fellowship and was murdered last night. And to say our thoughts and prayers are with them and their families, and their community, doesn't say enough to convey the heartache and the sadness and the anger that we feel."^[119]

On June 19, the United States Department of Justice fast-tracked a Crime Victim Assistance Formula Grant of \$29 million to the South Carolina government. Some of the money will be allocated to the survivors.^[120]

6.2 Families

After Roof's appearance at his bond hearing, his family issued a statement, expressing their shock and grief at his actions.^[121] Following the funerals of several of the victims in the shooting, they issued a second statement, expressing their condolences to the victims' families and announcing the temporary postponement of comments out of respect for them.^[122] During the bond hearing, several family members of the victims told Roof that they forgave him.^[77]

6.3 Religious community

The World Methodist Council, an association of worldwide churches in the Methodist tradition, of which the AME Church is a part, said it "urges prayer and support for the victims' families and those members of Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church who have been so gravely affected by this crime motivated by hate."^[123] The President and Vice-President of the British Methodist Conference, also a member of the World Methodist Council, sent a letter of solidarity to the African Methodist Episcopal Church, saying, "The hearts of the members of the Methodist Church of Great Britain go out to the families and friends of those killed; to the Church; and to the wider communities in Charleston."^[124]

The Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church, also a member of the World Methodist Council and in full communion with the African Methodist Episcopal Church, called on its members "to support the victims of this and all acts of violence, to work to end racism and hatred, to seek peace with justice, and to live the prayer that our Lord gave us, that God's 'kingdom come, [and]

will be done, on earth as it is in heaven'.^[125]

The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, also a member of the World Methodist Council and in full communion with the African Methodist Episcopal Church, shared its support with the presiding bishop, stating, "let us join with the AMEs in prayer for the healing of the families touched by this tragedy – the families of the victims and the family of the perpetrator."^[126]

The Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, stated, "We offer our prayers for healing to the wounded and traumatized, and solidarity and accompaniment to our sisters and brothers in the African Methodist Episcopal Church."^[127] Archbishop Joseph Edward Kurtz, the president of U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, made similar remarks.^[128]

Various national Jewish organizations, including the American Jewish Committee,^[129] Union for Reform Judaism,^[130] Jewish Federations of North America, Anti-Defamation League, and Orthodox Union issued statements deploring the attack and expressing deep grief and horror. The Rabbinical Assembly, in its own statement, quoted Leviticus, saying, "'Do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor.' Hateful, violent acts such as this have no place in our society, in a country known for its diversity and blending of various cultures."^[131]

Many national Muslim organizations and individual imams,^{[132][133]} such as Council on American–Islamic Relations,^[134] Islamic Society of North America (ISNA),^[135] and Islamic Circle of North America issued statements condemning the attack and offering sympathy for the victims.^[136] In a joint statement, CAIR and Muslim leaders in Baltimore quoted the Quran, saying, "The Qur'an, the Muslim holy book, says: 'He who takes one life, it is as if he has slain all of mankind. And he who saves one life, it is as if he has saved all of mankind.'"^[136]

Muslim and Jewish religious organizations have raised several hundred thousand dollars to help rebuild black churches that were burned down in the weeks after the shooting.^[137]

6.4 Others

At least eighteen candidates and prospective candidates for the 2016 U.S. presidential election expressed reactions through various media and addresses.^[138] According to NPR, Democrats and Republicans candidates found different ways to address the incident, with Democrats seeing race and gun control as central issues, while Republicans pointing to mental illness and referring to it as tragic but random act.^[139] Most Republican candidates eventually acknowledged that race was a motivating factor for the shooting. According to the *Christian Science Monitor*, the shooting became a precarious subject for Republican presidential contenders, in particu-

lar in regard of the racial motivations behind it, as South Carolina holds primaries and the state's political importance have resulted in some candidates "skirting around the clear racial motivations behind the attack."^[140]

The night following the attack, Jon Stewart delivered a monologue on *The Daily Show* discussing the tragic nature of the news, condemning the attacks as well as the media's response to it. Stewart argued that in response to Islamic terrorism, politicians declare they will do "whatever we can" to make America safe, even justifying torture, but respond to this mass shooting with "what are you gonna do, crazy is as crazy does".^[141]

The Council of Conservative Citizens, whose website Roof cited as a source for his radicalization, issued a statement on its website "unequivocally condemn[ing]" the attack, but that Roof has some "legitimate grievances" against black people. An additional statement from the group's president, Earl Holt III, disavowed responsibility for the crime and stated that the group's website "accurately and honestly report[s] black-on-white violent crime".^[142]

In an online forum, Charles Cotton, a lawyer in Houston and a national board member of the National Rifle Association, placed blame for the shooting on Pinckney for not allowing the churchgoers to hold concealed carry weapons inside the church. In 2011, Pinckney had voted against legislation that would allow concealed handguns to be carried into public places. Cotton also criticized the effectiveness of gun-free zones, stating, "If we look at mass shootings that occur, most happen in gun-free zones." Cotton's comment has since been deleted from the online forum.^{[143][144]}

Following the shooting, Rhodesians Worldwide, an online magazine catering to the Rhodesian expatriate community, issued a brief statement condemning Roof's actions in response to his use of the Rhodesian flag. In a disclaimer, the online magazine pointed out that 80% of the Rhodesian Security Forces were black and stressed that the Rhodesian Bush War was a struggle against communism rather than a racial conflict.^[145]

Jerry Richardson, the owner of the NFL's Carolina Panthers, donated \$100,000 to the Mother Emanuel Hope Fund set up by Mayor Riley, specifically calling for \$10,000 to each of the families of the nine victims to cover their funeral expenses, and the remaining \$10,000 to be delivered to the Emanuel AME Church itself.^{[146][147]}

7 Controversies

7.1 Confederate flag

Main article: Modern display of the Confederate flag § Reactions to 2015 Charleston church shooting

On June 18, 2015, the day after the shooting, many



The battle flag of the Confederate States of America.

flags, including those at the South Carolina State House, were flown at half-staff. The Confederate battle flag flying over the South Carolina Confederate Monument^[148] near the state house was not lowered, as South Carolina law prohibited alteration of the flag without the consent of two-thirds of the state legislature.^[149] Also, the flagpole lacked a pulley system, meaning the flag could not be flown at half-staff, only removed.^[149]

7.1.1 Flag removal from statehouse grounds



South Carolina State House with the Confederate Monument in front, flag at rest

Calls to remove the Confederate flag from statehouse grounds, as well as debates over the context of its symbolic nature, were renewed after the attack^{[150][151]} by several prominent figures, including President Barack Obama, Mitt Romney, and Jeb Bush.^[152] On June 20, several thousand people gathered in front of the South Carolina State House in protest. An online petition at

MoveOn.org encouraging the flag's removal had received over 370,000 signatures by that time.^[153]

At a statehouse press conference on June 22, 2015, Governor Nikki Haley, flanked by elected officials of both parties, including U.S. Republican senators Lindsey Graham and Tim Scott, and former Republican Governor Mark Sanford, called for the flag to be removed by the state legislature, saying that while the flag was "an integral part of our past, it does not represent the future" of South Carolina.^[154] Eulogizing the Rev. Clementa Pinckney on June 26, 2015, before 5,000 congregants at the College of Charleston, President Barack Obama acknowledged that the shooting had catalyzed a broad movement, backed by Republicans and Democrats, to remove the flag from official public display. "Blinded by hatred, [the gunman] failed to comprehend what Reverend Pinckney so well understood: the power of God's grace," Obama said. "By taking down that flag we express God's grace. But I don't think God wants us to stop there."^{[155][156]}

On July 6, 2015, the South Carolina Senate voted to remove the Confederate flag from display outside the South Carolina State House. Following 13 hours of debate, the vote in the House to remove it was passed by a two-thirds majority (94–20) on July 9. Governor Nikki Haley signed the bill on July 9.^[157] On July 10, the Confederate flag was taken down for the last time; it will be stored until it can later be shown in a museum.^[158]

7.1.2 Retailer bans

On June 23, 2015, retailers Wal-Mart, Amazon.com, Sears Holding Corporation (which owns Sears and Kmart), and eBay all announced plans to stop selling merchandise with the Confederate flag.^[159] Similarly, Warner Bros. announced that they were halting production of "General Lee" car toys, which prominently feature a Confederate flag on the roof.^[160]

Numerous other organizations, including flag manufacturers, also decided to stop profiting from the flag.^{[161][162][163]}

7.1.3 Other

In addition to the controversy regarding the Confederate flag's modern display, there have been considerations by institutions across the U.S. to remove the names of historic Confederate figures from schools, colleges, and streets. Campaigns to change the names were started in several cities.^[164]

In a national survey conducted in 2015, 57% of Americans opined that the Confederate flag represented Southern pride rather than racism. A previous poll in 2000 had a nearly identical result of 59%. However, poll results from only citizens living in the South yielded different results: 75% of whites described the flag as a symbol

of pride, while 75% of blacks said the flag represented racism.^[165]

7.2 Earl Holt political donations

Earl Holt, the leader of the Council of Conservative Citizens, whose website Roof credited in his manifesto for shaping his views, gave more than \$74,000^[166] to Republican candidates and committees in recent years including campaign donations to 2016 presidential candidates Ted Cruz, Rick Santorum and Rand Paul, who have all condemned Roof's racist motives.^{[167][168][169]} Following the shooting, and after a journalist contacted the campaigns with details about the donor's background, a spokesman for the Ted Cruz campaign said he would return an \$8,500 donation to Holt;^[169] the campaign later said it would be donating \$11,000 to the Mother Emanuel Hope Fund, to assist the victims' families.^[166] The Rand Paul campaign said Holt's \$2,250 donation would be given to the Fund,^[168] and Rick Santorum said his \$1,500 donation from Holt would be donated to the same charity.^[170] Twelve other Republican officeholders also announced they would be returning or donating Holt's contributions.^[166]

7.3 "Terrorism" terminology

See also: Definitions of terrorism

While some media professionals, politicians and law enforcement officials referred to the attack as domestic terrorism, others did not. This renewed a debate about the proper terminology to use when describing the shooting and other attacks.^[171]

On June 18, professor and terrorism expert Brian Phillips offered his definition of terrorism and said, "...[T]he massacre in Charleston, S.C. Wednesday was clearly a terrorist act." He based this conclusion on a racist political motivation that "seems likely" and his "intimidation of a wider audience" criterion was met when "...the shooter reportedly left one person alive to spread the message."^[172] An article by CNN National Security Analyst Peter Bergen and David Sterman on June 19 says, "By any reasonable standard, this is terrorism, which is generally defined as an act of violence against civilians by individuals or organizations for political purposes. ... [D]eadly acts of terrorism by virulent racists and anti-government extremists have been more common in the United States than deadly acts of jihadist terrorism since 9/11."^[173]

Some publications and analysis of the event posit that these naming discrepancies reflect forms of denial or outright racism.^{[174][175][176]}

Speaking on June 19 at a press conference in Baltimore, FBI Director James Comey said that while his agency was

investigating the shooting as a "hate crime", he did not consider it an "act of terrorism", citing the lack of political motivation for the suspect's actions.^{[177][178]} He said, "Terrorism is act of violence done or threatened in order to try to influence a public body or citizenry, so it's more of a political act, and again, based on what I know, I don't see this as a political act. Doesn't make it any less horrific, but terrorism has a definition under federal law."^[177]

Heidi Beirich, who leads the Intelligence Project of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), pointed to the discovery of a website attributed to Roof, which featured a manifesto and sixty photos as an example of why federal agents "don't have themselves together on this issue". The website began circulating on the Internet on June 20. Beirich said, "The way they found the website was that someone ran a domain tool reverse search on this guy's name... It wasn't rocket science, but where were the feds?"^[179]

On June 24, FBI spokesman Paul Bresson left open the possibility of terrorism charges, saying, "Any eventual federal charges will be determined by the facts at the conclusion of the investigation, and are not influenced by how the investigation is initially opened." Ultimately, it is up to Department of Justice prosecutors to decide what federal charges to bring. A spokesperson for Attorney General Loretta Lynch said the Department of Justice was investigating the shooting as both "a hate crime and as an act of domestic terrorism."^[180]

8 See also

- 16th Street Baptist Church bombing
- Wisconsin Sikh temple shooting
- Knoxville Unitarian Universalist church shooting
- Overland Park Jewish Community Center shooting

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10 External links

- The Last Rhodesian via Archive.org - Dylann Roof website
- "South Carolina State Senate Debate on the Confederate Flag". C-SPAN. June 23, 2015.

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11.1 Text

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