

# Mass killing at African American church in Charleston, South Carolina

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A horrific mass killing took place at an African American church in Charleston, South Carolina Wednesday evening. A young white man allegedly opened fire during a prayer meeting, killing six women and three men.

One of those murdered was the senior pastor of the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, the Rev. Clementa Pinckney, a Democratic Party South Carolina state senator who had spent much of Wednesday campaigning with Democratic presidential hopeful, Hillary Clinton.

The Emanuel AME is one of the oldest black churches in the US. Denmark Vesey, the mastermind of a planned slave revolt in 1822 that was suppressed by authorities, was a founder of the church.

The alleged gunman, 21-year-old Dylann Storm Roof, reportedly entered the church and sat for an hour during the prayer meeting before carrying out the heinous crime. According to a survivor, Roof, who reloaded his weapon several times, declared, “You rape our women and you’re taking over our country, and you have to go.”

Roof left the scene in his automobile. He was apprehended without incident by police Thursday at approximately 11:30 a.m., still in his car, in Shelby, North Carolina, some 250 miles northwest of Charleston and 45 miles west of Charlotte, North Carolina.

The suspect’s Facebook profile page includes a photo of Roof wearing a jacket with badges representing the flags of apartheid-era South Africa and Rhodesia. According to the Anti-Defamation League, “Since 1994, white supremacists in South Africa and elsewhere around the world, including the United States, have adopted the 1928 [South African] flag as a symbol of white supremacy.”

Roof’s uncle, Carson Cowles, the brother of the young man’s mother, told Reuters that his nephew was an introverted, troubled individual. “He was like 19 years old, he still didn’t have a job, a driver’s license or anything like that and he just stayed in his room a lot of the time,” Cowles commented. Roof’s father apparently gave his son a .45 caliber pistol for his birthday this year.

An FBI official in Columbia, South Carolina asserted that Roof had not been on the agency’s “radar.” Charleston police chief Greg Mullen was quick to claim that the suspect had acted alone, without indicating how he could be certain of this given that the investigation into the crime had just begun. Needless to say, if there had been any way to tie the suspect to “Islamic terrorism,” the authorities would have taken a dramatically different approach.

The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), which tracks right-wing extremist groups, noted in a statement, “Since 9/11, our country has been fixated on the threat of Jihadi terrorism. But the horrific tragedy at the Emanuel AME reminds us that the threat of homegrown domestic terrorism is very real.”

The SPLC, on its web site, points to the existence of nearly two dozen white supremacist or neo-Nazi organizations based in South Carolina.

Links between these outfits and official political life in South Carolina are extensive. In 2013 the SPLC’s Hatewatch revealed that a member of Republican governor Nikki Haley’s 2014 re-election committee, Roan Garcia-Quintana of Greenville, was a lifetime member and current board member of the blatantly racist Council of Conservative Citizens (CCC), the descendant of the old White Citizens Council, the “respectable” version of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1950s and 1960s.

Another leading South Carolina Republican, Kyle Rogers, a member of the party's Dorchester County Executive Committee, was also exposed in 2013 as belonging to the CCC.

Gov. Haley, a favorite of the Tea Party wing of the Republican Party, declared Thursday that the "heart and soul of South Carolina was broken" by the mass killing. In 2014 she defended the flying of the Confederate flag on the statehouse grounds, dear to the heart of reactionaries, on the grounds that "not a single CEO" had complained to her.

The response of the political establishment in general has been hypocritical and empty to an obscene extent. Whatever the immediate political or psychological driving forces behind Roof's alleged action, it is evident that such a killing emerges in a specific political and social context.

On Thursday afternoon President Barack Obama expressed his "deep sorrow over the senseless murders" in Charleston. Obama continued, "Any death of this sort is a tragedy. Any shooting involving multiple victims is a tragedy." The president suggested that "At some point, we as a country will have to reckon with the fact that this type of mass violence does not happen in other advanced countries."

Needless to say, Obama chose not to probe that reality any deeper. In fact, the impact of endless war, militarism and bellicosity on backward layers of the population in the US is a central fact to bear in mind when considering horrific episodes like the Charleston bloodbath.

The most reactionary elements have been mobilized on the basis of American military interventions, bombing raids or drone strikes in countless regions of the world. In their comments, US officials increasingly sound like underworld chieftains, with their continual references to "killing" and "eliminating" enemies. It is absolutely inevitable that this violence will be imitated by the most psychologically vulnerable and politically disoriented individuals.

Someone like Roof, if he turns out to be the culprit, has known nothing but this expanding and escalating violence all his life. And not only violence overseas. Police in the US have been given a green light to open fire and kill innocent civilians. Only two months ago, in North Charleston, South Carolina, less than 10 miles from the scene of Wednesday night's mass killings, a

local police officer murdered Walter Scott in cold blood with five bullets in the back.

The American ruling elite, despite its wretched and unconvincing handwringing over episodes like the most recent one in Charleston, has deliberately cultivated this right-wing, fascistic element as part of its drive to dominate the globe. Nor is the presence and even resurgence of racist ideology simply some inevitable product of South Carolina's history as a bastion of the Confederacy, although that history may well be a factor.

The prosecution of wars against the populations of the Middle East and Central Asia, and potentially Africa and Latin America, requires the building up of nativism, extreme nationalism and colonialist contempt for the oppressed peoples whose countries are targeted for conquest by US imperialism.

Moreover, these "homegrown domestic terrorists," i.e., fascist elements, will be directed against the population at home as the accumulated impact of deteriorating living standards, poverty and the destruction of democratic rights ignites mass opposition and resistance.



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