



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on June 18, 2015

## Pastor and Eight Others Killed at South Carolina Church; Suspect Caught

A shooter identified by the FBI as Dylann Storm Roof of Columbia, South Carolina, walked into a Wednesday night Bible study class at the historic Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston on June 17 and allegedly opened fire, killing the pastor, the Reverend Clementa C. Pinckney, and eight church members. Pinckney was also a member of the South Carolina State Senate, representing Senate District 45 as a Democrat.



Reuters reported that the FBI identified Roof as the shooter after Roof's uncle, Carson Cowles, recognized him in the surveillance photo circulated by the media. "The more I look at him, the more I'm convinced, that's him," Cowles told Reuters in a phone interview.

As we write, Roof has been arrested in Shelby, North Carolina. AP cited a statement from Charleston Police Chief Greg Mullen, who said the suspect was arrested during a traffic stop at approximately 11:15 a.m., EDT.

A citizen reportedly alerted police to Roof's vehicle, which he thought was suspicious, Mullen said.

"I am so pleased that we were able to resolve this case quickly ... so that nobody else is harmed by this individual who obviously committed a tragic, heinous crime in the city of Charleston," Mullen was quoted as saying by NBC News.

NBC also reported details about the attack, received from surviving church members. Roof reportedly went to the church, asked for Reverend Pinckney, and sat among parishioners during a Bible study meeting.

One of the survivors related details to Pinckney's cousin, Sylvia Johnson, who told NBC affiliate WIS-TV:

At the conclusion of the Bible study, from what I understand, they just start hearing loud noises ringing out, and he had already wounded — the suspect already wounded a couple of individuals.

The female survivor told Johnson that the gunman reloaded five different times and that her son was trying to "talk him out of doing the act of killing people," reported NBC.

But he wouldn't listen, she said.

"You rape our women and you're taking over our country. And you have to go," the shooter told the parishioners, the survivor related to Johnson.

The fact that Roof had the time to reload five times indicates that the church was effectively a "gun-free zone" and that the members were all unarmed.

In a statement delivered from the White House Briefing Room on June 18, President Obama — choosing his words carefully — made it clear that he considers Americans' ability to purchase arms as the culprit in this tragedy, stating, in part:



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We don't have all the facts, but we do know that, once again, innocent people were killed, in part, because someone who wanted to inflict harm had no trouble getting their hands on a gun.

Now's the time for mourning, and for healing.

But let's be clear: At some point, we as a country will have to reckon with the fact that this kind of mass violence does not happen in other advanced countries. It doesn't happen, in other places, with this kind of frequency.

And, it is in our power to do something about it. I say that recognizing the politics in this town foreclose a lot of those avenues right now. But it would be wrong for us not to acknowledge it. And at some point it's going to be important for the American people to come to grips with it and for us to be able to shift how we think about the issue of gun violence collectively.

Such is the call after every tragic event in which guns were used, whether it be the Columbine High School massacre in 1999, the Virginia Tech shooting in 2007, the Fort Hood shooting in 2009, or the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in 2012. All of these were senseless tragedies in which very disturbed individuals, for reasons that may never be known, decided to kill innocent people. During all of these incidents, the unarmed victims were unable to defend themselves against the perpetrators. In the Fort Hood incident, the gunman was eventually brought down, not by unarmed military personnel, but by a civilian police sergeant, Mark Todd.

Granted, the assailants in each case used a gun, but the killers were not motivated to kill by the act of possessing a gun, but by evil or deranged thoughts deep inside them. While a gun may be a more efficient means of killing than a knife or club, it is also a more efficient way for potential victims to defend themselves. Disarming the masses merely provides the very few evil murderers among us with defenseless targets for their insane rage.

Dr. John R. Lott, Jr., a columnist and the author of eight books including *More Guns, Less Crime*, wrote an opinion piece about the Charleston tragedy posted by FoxNews.com on June 18 headlined: "Gun-free zones an easy target for killers." Lott began his essay:

The horrible tragedy last night that left nine people dead at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, S.C., probably could have been avoided. Like so many other attacks, the massacre took place in a gun-free zone, a place where the general public was banned from having guns. The gun-free zone obviously didn't stop the killer from bringing a gun into the church.

Indeed, the circumstantial evidence is strong that these killers don't attack randomly; they keep picking the few gun-free zones to do virtually all their attacks.

In identifying Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church as a "gun-free zone," Lott cited a synopsis of South Carolina law:

You may not carry a firearm on school premises (including day care and preschool facilities), in law enforcement offices or facilities, in court facilities, at polling places on election days, in churches or other religious sanctuaries, or in hospitals or medical facilities. (S.C. Code Ann. § 23-31-215.)

Lott concluded his article: "Churches, like the one in Charleston, preach peace, but the killer there probably chose that target because he knew the victims were defenseless."

There are many factors to consider in this very tragic event, and we would be remiss to deny that (unlike other similar events where racism may be falsely cited as a motive) this attack may have indeed



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been racially motivated.

When Roof told the assumed congregation, “You rape our women and you’re taking over our country. And you have to go,” the “you” almost certainly meant American blacks.

That this man was apparently so irrationally consumed by hatred is unquestionably a terrible thing. However, guns cannot be blamed for the man’s pathetic disorder. That fault lies within the hidden recesses of his mind and his soul.

Photo of memorial service for shooting: AP Images

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