

Charleston church killer was spawned in a racist swamp



By **David Horsey**
Top of the Ticket

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Conservatives strangely discount racist motivation in Charleston church massacre

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Having recently spent several inspiring hours singing, praying and sharing meals with members of a historic black church in Montgomery, Ala., I am especially troubled by the murder of nine African American men and women during a Bible study at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, S.C. The folks I met in Alabama were among the most genuine Christians and solid Americans I have ever encountered and, from everything I have heard about them, the victims in Charleston were the same type of outstanding citizens.

They were among the best of us and their alleged killer, [Dylann Roof](#), one of the worst. He sat beside them throughout the session of religious study before gunning them down with a pistol he reportedly received as a 21st birthday present from his father. Apparently, this was not a spur-of-the-moment act. Acquaintances say Roof had expressed deep anger toward black people and had boasted, as long as a month ago, about his intention to spark a race war. As he shot and reloaded and shot some more at the church Wednesday night, he responded to pleas of mercy by saying he had to kill because, “You rape our women and you’re taking over our country — and you have to go.”

Within hours of the incident, the white mayor and white police chief of Charleston were calling it a hate crime. Shockingly, though, several prominent conservatives spoke up to discount the clear evidence that Roof was motivated by racism.

Ex-New York Mayor Rudi Giuliani advised against injecting race into the situation and said of the shooter, “We have no idea what’s in his mind. Maybe he hates Christian churches.”

Fox and Friends host Steve Doocy was appalled that people jumped to the conclusion this was a hate crime motivated by race, then jumped to his own conclusion that the shooter was acting out “hostility toward Christians.”

GOP presidential aspirant [Rick Santorum](#) called the killings an “assault on religious liberty,” asking “what other rationale could there be?” Another candidate for the Republican presidential nomination, South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham, mentioned race in passing, but emphasized that “there are people out there looking for Christians to kill.”

Two things are at work here in the reaction on the right and both are a bit sickening. The first is that many conservatives seem so tangled up in their own talking points about a secular “war on Christianity” that they have seized on this horrible event to spew self-serving political propaganda. The second is that they are so in denial about the realities of race in America that they initially rejected as a media invention the idea that the white shooter killed the church members because they were black.

Sen. Graham, being interviewed on “The View,” said of the church massacre, “It’s not a window into the soul of South Carolina. It’s not who we are, it’s not who our country is, it’s about this guy.” Nice bromides, but, actually, the senator is deluded or evading the truth.

“This guy” may be a freak, but he did not come out of nowhere. With a long list of hate groups and a bleak history of slavery and segregation — not to mention a Confederate flag flying at the state Capitol — South Carolina still has plenty of fertile ground where a human weed like Dylann Roof can be raised up with a racist conception of the world. And, as far as the nation as a whole, justifications for violent political action and racial animosity have found a megaphone on the Internet and in the extremist rhetoric that goes unchallenged by cowering conservative politicians.

Yes, conservatives, there are white supremacists in America and, among the symbols they like to display — besides the stars and bars of the Confederacy — are the flags of apartheid-era South Africa and Rhodesia. Coincidentally, there is a photo of Roof on social media that shows him wearing a jacket emblazoned with both those flags and another photo of him straddling a car license plate bearing the words “Confederate States of America” above an array of rebel banners. **Clues like these and the connections to organizations the Confederate Freedom Alliance illuminate Roof’s real motivations, while there is not a shred of evidence to support the conservatives’ alternative scenario.**

The shooter may have picked a church for his crime scene, but it is willful ignorance to insist he murdered nine people because they were Christians, not because of the color of their folded, praying hands.

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