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The Honorable Nikki R. Haley
Office of the Governor
1205 Pendleton Street
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Dear Governor Haley,

As an Indian immigrant to the United States, I watched your elections as a two-term Governor of South Carolina with mixed feelings. While I was proud of the fact that a woman of Indian descent had been elected to the highest state position in South Carolina, your political views and party affiliation are diametrically opposed to mine. Nonetheless, I enjoyed the fact that John C. Calhoun is probably rolling in his grave at your ascent in Carolinian politics.

At many points, I have wanted to send you a copy of my book on antebellum South Carolina politics and its road to secession. I spent nearly a year in Columbia researching my doctoral dissertation, which became my first book. It always galled me to see the Confederate battle flag flying in the state Capitol, a symbol of slavery raised in defiance to desegregation in 1961. I applaud your decision this year to support taking down a divisive and for most a racist symbol after the massacre in the AME Emanuel church in Charleston. In appreciation for that action by your government, I am sending you a copy of my book, *The Counterrevolution of Slavery* (2000). I hope you will find time to read it at some point. I am also enclosing a copy of my article on the storied history of the AME church published in *The Huffington Post* this summer.

Our politics will I fear always be in conflict but as a South Carolinian by affiliation if not birth, and as a woman of Indian descent, I hope you will perceive the human cost of a certain kind of extremist state and southern politics that has been long in the making. One can only hope that a rising generation of southerners, children of immigrants like you, will undo its sorry history of racial division.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Manisha Sinha".

Manisha Sinha

Professor and Graduate Program Director

December 7, 2015

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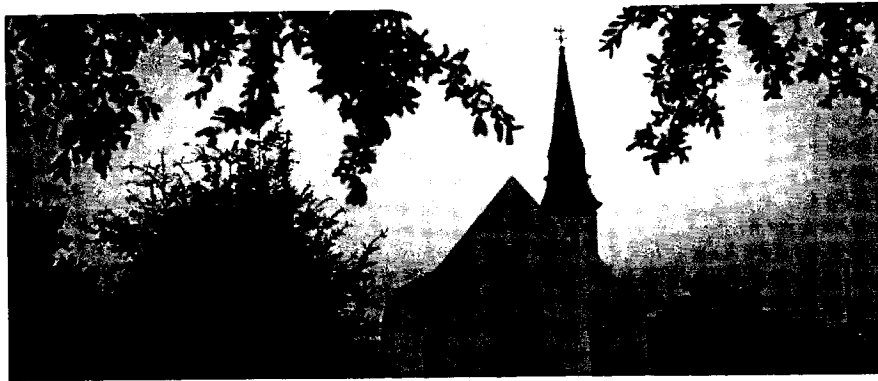
Manisha Sinha

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 History at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

The Long and Proud History of Charleston's AME Church

Posted: 06/19/2015 12:17 pm EDT | Updated: 06/19/2015 2:59 pm EDT



When 21-year-old Dylann Roof opened fire at the historic Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church in Charleston, South Carolina on Wednesday night killing nine worshippers, including its pastor, Reverend Clementa Pinckney, he struck at the very heart of black America. Established by Reverend Richard Allen, a former slave and Methodist preacher, the A.M.E. is the oldest black denomination in the country. Its roots lie in one of the first black religious and mutual help societies, the Free African Society founded by Philadelphia blacks in 1787. Like other independent churches and societies founded by newly free African Americans, it has a proud history of black protest and community activism.

In 1792, Allen and Reverend Absalom Jones, led a walkout at St. George's Methodist Church in Philadelphia. They had dared to pray in the front pews reserved for whites rather than in the segregated gallery constructed for blacks. Zealous church authorities had interrupted their prayers and forced them to rise to their feet. As the story goes, this unseemly incident was the impetus for the founding of independent black churches. In 1794, with black contributions and donations from the British abolitionist Granville Sharp, President George Washington, and the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, Jones's African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas opened its doors, boasting over four hundred members. Founded the same year, Allen's Mother Bethel Methodist Church was incorporated in 1796. Later Allen composed an "African Supplement" to proclaim his church's autonomy. In 1816, he issued a call to all black Methodists in the surrounding area. Delegates from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, and Maryland, including Moses Brown from Charleston, South Carolina met and founded the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1816, and Allen became its first bishop.

AME churches soon spread north, west and even to the south acquiring a large congregation in Charleston, South Carolina in the midst of one of the largest slave societies in the United States. In 1818, Reverend Brown, replicating Allen's and Jones' actions, led a walkout of black members from the Methodist church protesting the treatment of black burial grounds by whites and established the AME church in Charleston with four thousand members.

Right from the start, the AME, like other independent black churches, gave birth to antislavery protest. Allen and Jones were authors of early abolitionist pamphlets and petitions. Their "An Address to Those Who Keep Slaves and Uphold the Practice," reminded whites that slavery is "hateful... in the sight of God" and that "God himself was the first pleader of the cause of the slaves." The most potent challenge to slavery came from the AME church in Charleston. One of its founders and class leaders, Denmark Vesey, a literate black carpenter who had bought his freedom after winning a lottery, was implicated in a slave conspiracy scare in 1822. State authorities had harassed church members and used the conspiracy as an excuse to destroy the church. Its' ministers, Brown and Reverend Henry Drayton were forced to leave South Carolina. Brown became the second bishop of the AME on Allen's death. Black Charlestonians rebuilt their church until the city outlawed independent black churches in 1834. In a fitting coda, Robert Vesey, Denmark Vesey's son, helped rebuild the Charleston church in 1848.

During the Civil Rights movement, the Emanuel AME Church of Charleston continued to be the site of black protest. In 1969, the South Carolina National Guard arrested the church's pastor and nine hundred others at a demonstration for hospital workers led by Coretta Scott King. The black church lay at the organizational base of the mass movement for black rights and equality in the south. With good reason, white supremacists and segregationist have targeted it, most infamously in the 1963 Birmingham church bombing that killed four young black girls. A resurgence of black church burnings in the south in the 1990s led the Justice Department to launch a civil rights investigation and civil rights activists volunteered to rebuild them. This latest attack on a black church is all too reminiscent of this tragic history.

Just a year ago, the city of Charleston finally honored Denmark Vesey with a statue after years of controversy when some conservative commentators labeled him a "terrorist." One might well paraphrase the great black abolitionist, Frederick Douglass, who asked, "Pray, tell me who is the barbarian here?" during the height of lynching in the post-Civil War South. On the 150th anniversary of Juneteenth or June 19, the day many of the enslaved celebrated as the day of emancipation, one might ask, Pray, who is the terrorist here?

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Joseph Washington · University of Illinois Springfield

Those who have chosen evil will be held to account.

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Karen Moser · Florida Institute of Technology

Thank you, Professor Sinha, for the historical perspective. I wish the history classes had covered more of this sort of thing when I was in school.

Like · Reply · 4 · Jun 19, 2015 11:48am



Penny Dianna · University of Iowa

As a lifelong member of the historic AME church in my own community and as a member of the human family in general, my prayers, my heart, and my condolences go out to the victims' families and to the congregation of Emanuel AME Church. It has a long proud history of having stood firm and kept the faith in the midst of great tribulation and despite all evil attempts to prevent its establishment. God is not mocked.

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