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Roof found guilty in church slayings

BY JEFFREY COLLINS
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Associated Press

CHARLESTON — Dylann Roof was convicted Thursday in the chilling slaughter of nine black church members who had welcomed him to their Bible study, a devastating crime in a country that was already deeply embroiled in racial tension.

The same federal jury that found Roof guilty of all 33 counts will reconvene next month to hear more testimony and weigh whether to sentence him to death. As the verdict was read, Roof just stared ahead, much as he did the entire trial.

Roof

from 1A
 state court on nine murder charges.

In closing arguments, Assistant U.S. Attorney Nathan Williams mocked Roof for calling himself brave in his hate-filled journal and during his confession, saying the real bravery came from the victims who tried to stop him as he fired 77 bullets at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal church.

“Those people couldn’t see the hatred in his heart any more than they could see the .45-caliber handgun and the eight magazines concealed around his waist,” Williams said.

Defense lawyer David Bruck conceded Roof committed the slayings, but he asked jurors to look into his head and see what caused him to become so full of hatred, calling him a suicidal loner who never grasped the gravity of what he did.

The defense put up no witnesses during the seven-day trial. They tried to present evi-

Family members of victims held hands and squeezed one another’s arms. One woman nodded her head every time the clerk said “guilty.”

Roof, 22, told FBI agents he wanted to bring back segregation or perhaps start a race war with the slayings. Instead, the single biggest change to emerge from the June 17, 2015, killings was the removal of the Confederate flag from the South Carolina Statehouse, where it had flown for 50 years over the Capitol or on the grounds. Roof appeared with the flag in several photos in a racist manifesto.

The shooting happened just months after Walter Scott, an unarmed black man, was killed by white police of-

ficer Michael Slager when he fled a traffic stop in North Charleston. Police shootings around the county have heightened tensions between black communities and the law enforcement agencies that patrol them, sometimes resulting in protests and riots.

In Roof’s confession to the FBI, the gunman said he carried out the killings after researching “black on white crime” on the internet. He said he chose a church because that setting posed little danger to him.

Roof told the judge again Thursday that he wanted to act as his own attorney during the penalty phase. He will also face a death penalty trial in

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dence about his mental state, but the judge ruled that it did not have anything to do with Roof’s guilt or innocence.

Roof was just imitating what he saw on the internet and believed he had to give his life to “a fight to the death between white people and black people that only he” could see and act on, Bruck said.

The prosecutor’s 50-minute closing argument filled the court with tension. At times, the prosecutor raised his voice, saying Roof was a cold, calculated killer. Some family members of victims dabbed their eyes with tissues, and jurors appeared emotional when Williams, after apologizing to them, showed crime scene photos of each person killed alongside a small picture of them while alive.

Those pictures included the Rev. Clementa Pinckney, 41, Emanuel AME’s pastor and a state senator; Myra Thomp-

son, 59, who taught Bible study that night; Cynthia Hurd, 54, a librarian who stayed to support Thompson; and Depayne Middleton-Doctor, 49, who friends said sang like an angel.

Also slain were Daniel “Dapper Dan” Simmons, 74, nicknamed for his shiny shoes and fine hats; Sharonda Coleman-Singleton, 45, a high school track coach; Ethel Lance, 70, the church sexton who kept the bathrooms and building immaculately clean; Susie Jackson, 87, who sang in the choir; and Tywanza Sanders, 26, Jackson’s nephew and an aspiring poet.

Three people survived the shooting. One survivor, Felicia Sanders, wouldn’t say if she wanted Roof put to death, but said he was a coward because he refused to look at her as she testified.

She plans a simple gesture to honor her friends the rest of her life. “I wear a smile, because if you look at the pictures of all nine, they’re smiling,”

Sanders said.

The prosecutor said the good of all those faithful churchgoers prevailed over Roof’s hatred.

“This defendant chose to take their lives. He chose to break their bodies. But he does not get to choose who they were,” Williams said.

In a lengthy recording played earlier at trial, Roof told FBI agents he picked Mother Emanuel because of its historic significance in the black community. The church is the oldest in the South and one of its founders Denmark Vesey led a failed 1822 slave rebellion that drove the church underground.

Roof, who was convicted of federal hate crimes and obstruction of religion, said he had felt compelled to act because of the way blacks treated whites and said the shootings were “minuscule” in comparison.

The prosecutor recounted other evidence, like how Roof sat in the church parking lot

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for 28 minutes in his car, likely reloading the 88 bullets — a number embraced symbolically by white supremacists — into eight magazines. Roof was handed a Bible as he sat in the prayer service for nearly 45 minutes before opening fire when the worshippers closed their eyes for the final prayer.

After the shootings, South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley

threw her support behind removing the Confederate flag from the Statehouse. She had spent years in office calling it a settled issue.

“It is my hope that the survivors, the families, and the people of South Carolina can find some peace in the fact that justice has been served,” she said in a statement.



Roof



AP PHOTO/BRAD NETTLES/THE POST AND COURIER

John Pinckney, father of shooting victim Rev. Clementa Pinckney, is greeted after leaving J. Waites Waring Federal Courthouse in Charleston on Thursday, where Dylan Roof was found guilty of all 33 federal charges in the Emanuel AME Church shootings.



Title: **Economists expect steady gains for state in 2017**
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Economists expect steady gains for state in 2017

From staff reports

Steady economic gains are expected for South Carolina in 2017 despite the political uncertainty that comes with a new governor and U.S. president. The gains build on positive growth across most of the Palmetto State's industries and regions, according to University of South Carolina economists at the Darla Moore School of Business.

Doug Woodward, director of research, and Joseph Von Nessen, a research economist, presented their 2017 forecast Dec. 8 to more than 150 of the state's business and community leaders at the 36th Annual Economic Outlook Conference. They reported that the state is poised to build on its existing momentum and to continue generating new jobs and rising incomes for South Carolinians.

They expect job creation – the single best predictor of economic performance – to grow 2.6 percent in 2017.

"South Carolina's economy is growing at a healthy pace," said Von Nessen. "And we expect the state to continue to build on this momentum in 2017."

He said the South Carolina's economy also is in the midst of a "paradigm shift," which will bring new challenges for the state in 2017.

"For the last several years our rate of economic growth has been accelerating, but in 2016 it leveled off and is now grow-

ing at a constant rate," Von Nessen said. "In addition, the labor market has strengthened considerably. Our unemployment rate has dropped to 4.7 percent. And although this is good news for workers, it also means that employers are now struggling to find qualified employees to fill new positions. Going forward, if we want to achieve a higher rate of economic growth, this skills gap will have to be addressed."

Tackling a skills gap will likely be an important part of the next governor's mission.

"Gov. Haley came into office with a priority to generate employment opportunities for South Carolinians during a period of high unemployment following the Great Recession," Von Nessen said. "Lt. Gov. McMaster, by contrast, will likely inherit a healthier economy in which unemployment is relatively low, and a skills gap that prevents many workers from being hired."

The economists said two industry sectors led the broad-based growth in 2016.

The manufacturing sector and the professional and business services sector were the fastest growing industries this year, having driven high-wage job creation throughout the state and supporting high rates of consumer spending.

"We are seeing strong job

growth within the professional service sectors, as well as within aerospace, automotive and tire manufacturing," he said. "Each of these industries is creating jobs that pay significantly above the state average. In turn, these workers are spending their wages in South Carolina and thus creating additional economic activity."

They also identified the construction sector as a bright spot.

Construction played a key role in South Carolina's economic growth in 2016, especially along the coastal regions of the state. In addition to the overall strengthening of housing demand, which experienced lackluster growth from 2010 to 2015, the construction industry was propelled by rebuilding efforts going toward repairing damage from the historic 2015 flood.

In fact, Woodward and Von Nessen estimate that more than 20,000 temporary S.C. jobs will have been created in the construction and retail sectors by the time the rebuilding process is completed. They also expect a similar, though smaller, stimulus in the construction industry to occur in 2017 as a result of Hurricane Matthew.

The economists anticipate the size of the labor force to continue to grow in 2017 as job opportunities continue to rise, which

implies marginal decreases in the unemployment rate over the next year.

The Moore School forecast outlines an unemployment rate over the next 12 months that will drop slightly from its current rate of 4.7 percent to approximately 4.5 percent. However, total personal income is shown to grow at 4.8 percent in 2017 – a rate comparable to its growth rate in 2016.

The daylong Economic Outlook Conference also included a keynote address from Boston University economist Laurence Kotlikoff on how the new Trump administration will likely affect the U.S. economy. The two most significant economic impacts of a Trump presidency on the Palmetto State are a possible renegotiation or elimination of trade deals and changes in military and veteran spending. Manufacturing exports and the state's military presence play major roles in the state's economy.

Kotlikoff also addressed the federal budget, debt and other critical issues that will face the new administration in 2017.

The conference also featured presentations on South Carolina's long-run competitiveness by Meghan Hughes Hickman, executive director of EngenuitySC, and Ann Marie Stieritz, president and CEO of the South Carolina Council on Competitiveness.