



Southern Rural Sociological Association

Statement on Charleston Church Shooting

The Southern Rural Sociological Association (SRSA) is an educational and scientific organization established to foster the study, understanding, and application of rural sociology in the South. We express our condolences to the families of the nine church members who were killed during the recent shooting at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina. The tragic loss of innocent lives in what has been called a “hate crime” targeting African-Americans illustrates the persistent racial tensions present in today’s society, particularly in the southern region of the United States. For us this represents a teachable moment for further reflection and analysis.

As rural sociologists we analyze people and the social worlds they create and perpetuate. The role of rural sociology is not only to investigate and research human social behavior, but also to recommend prescriptive measures and calls for action based on the history of and cultures in our region. While racism and violence are not unique to the South, the antecedents (slavery) and symbols (the Confederate flag) were certainly a part of it and continue to be. To really understand what happened in Charleston we need to understand the social world that produced an action that speaks of hatred and ignorance, underlying a belief of primacy and supremacy, and racism. Arguably, racism is the primary issue that we as a country have yet to fully address, that we often want to pretend has been resolved, and when put in our faces we attempt to pass off as the act of a deranged mind.

Instead, we need to use our sociological perspective and other tools within the academy to explore, discuss and dissect the indicators within our social worlds that allow and produce thought or beliefs that would lead someone to such a horrific action. When leaders can speak of wanting to “take the country back,” and when the emblems of the supremacy of one race over another can be enshrined on state house lawns, and sanctioned on state-issued license plates, we need to ask the tough sociological questions about what this implies about what is considered acceptable to perpetuate.

Collectively, as members of SRSA we have to join in the conversation that moves our organizations, institutions, and communities toward positive social action and change, or risk saddling future generations to resolve the difficult questions. We challenge you to join us.

Sincerely,

SRSA Executive Committee

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