

Obama's eulogy in Charleston, South Carolina

By Andre Damon
29 June 2015

US President Barack Obama delivered a eulogy Friday for Clementa Pinckney, the South Carolina Democratic Party state senator and pastor killed in the June 17 mass shooting at an African-American church in Charleston, South Carolina.

The speech consisted of a mixture of religious mysticism absolutely inappropriate for a US president and cheap moralizing platitudes. To the extent that any political issues were addressed, Obama sought again to separate racism from its historical and political roots in order to obscure the social issues underlying the horrific mass murder.

Predictably, the media universally hailed the speech as a triumph. The *New York Times* declared it one of the “presidency’s most impassioned reflections on race,” while the *Washington Post* declared that the event showed Obama’s “deep personal roots in the black church.”

These “deep roots” are a fiction. Obama was raised by his white, nonreligious mother, and his later connection to the “black church” was a matter of political expediency. His efforts to don the mantle of a black preacher, complete with the inflections and accents, is like everything he does: political playacting.

In relatively short remarks, Obama referred to “our Christian faith” and invoked the words “God” 17 times, “grace” 35 times, and speculated about the causes of “salvation of sinners and the bestowal of blessings.”

He opened his sermon, delivered at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, where Pinckney was a pastor, with the words: “Giving all praise and honor to God.” Following Obama’s remarks, Norvel Goff, an elder at the church, referred to him as “the Reverend President.”

In a country founded on a revolution that upheld the

separation of church and state as a basic democratic principle, there is something deeply reactionary about all of this.

Bizarrely, Obama declared that the man who shot nine unarmed people at the church he was speaking at was somehow carrying out God’s will. While the killer was hoping to “deepen divisions,” the president declared, “God works in mysterious ways. God has different ideas. He didn’t know he was being used by God.”

Obama’s endless references to the Christian deity, including the absurd statement above, were intended to paper over the fact that he has no serious explanation for the shooting. He can say nothing about the real social and historical roots of racism, or its continued role in the present social system.

This was put on flagrant display when he declared that the “recent eloquence” of South Carolina governor Nikki Haley “is worthy of praise.” He did not consider it prudent to note the fact that Haley had in 2013 appointed a member of the racist Council of Conservative Citizens, which Dylann Roof cited as an inspiration, to her reelection campaign.

To the extent that Obama sought to address the causes of racism, it was to expand upon his statement earlier this month that racism was in the “DNA” of America by declaring that it traces back to “our nation’s original sin.” (See, “The social roots of racism in America”)

Having rooted racism essentially in the American psyche, not class interests, Obama chronicled a litany of government abuses and social blights as though they were the result of the racism of the American people, and not the policies that he and his predecessors had been carrying out for decades.

“Perhaps this tragedy causes us to ask some tough

questions,” Obama said, “about how we can permit so many of our children to languish in poverty, or attend dilapidated schools, or grow up without prospects for a job or for a career.”

Obama might not like the answers to these “tough questions.” After all, since the beginning of his presidency, the number of people employed in the state and local government education sector has dropped by more than 200,000, as his “race to the top” program slashed funding from “underperforming” schools in poor neighborhoods.

Meanwhile, the number of people in poverty in the United States has grown by more than 2 million, to 45.8 million (using a conservative estimate) in the same period. In recent years, Obama has signed into law multiple cuts to food stamp benefits, home heating assistance, and the duration of extended unemployment benefits.

Obama then moved on to speculate that this month’s shooting “causes us to examine what we’re doing to cause some of our children to hate. Perhaps it softens hearts toward those lost young men, tens and tens of thousands caught up in the criminal justice system.”

This from a president who has refused to bring federal civil rights charges against a single one of the thousands of police who have killed people during his presidency, and whose Justice Department has sided with killer cops in every single police violence case that has come before the Supreme Court. The Obama administration continues to support the barbaric practice of capital punishment, even in the aftermath of the recent series of gruesome “botched” executions.

And Obama, for all his stale rhetoric about grace and forgiveness, is waging murderous wars around the globe and holds meetings every Tuesday to decide who his government will blow up that week with a drone missile, having declared that he is “really good at killing people.”

Perhaps the “Reverend” Obama would have us believe that he, too, is carrying out God’s work?

Obama’s attempts to present racism as residing “in the DNA” of the American people and the result of “original sin” seek to obscure the basic fact that racial and ethnic hatred, as well as the regular eruptions of homicidal mass violence, are the product of the growing inequality, poverty and militarism of the society that he presides over.

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