

supremacist gunman who posted online a photograph of himself with the Confederate battle flag. President Obama traveled to the city to deliver a eulogy for one of the victims, Clementa Pinckney, the church's pastor and a member of the South Carolina Senate. His speech reflected on the history of race relations and the condition of black America fifty years after the height of the civil rights revolution. In the aftermath of the murders, the state of South Carolina removed the Confederate flag from the grounds of the state house in the capital, Columbia, and deposited it in a museum.

FRIENDS OF HIS remarked this week that when Clementa Pinckney entered a room, it was like the future arrived, that even from a young age, folks knew he was special, anointed. He was the progeny of a long line of the faithful, a family of preachers who spread God's words, a family of protesters who so changed to expand voting rights and desegregate the South.

As a senator, he represented a sprawling swathe of low country, a place that has long been one of the most neglected in America, a place still racked by poverty and inadequate schools, a place where children can still go hungry and the sick can go without treatment—a place that needed somebody like Clem.

Clem was often asked why he chose to be a pastor and a public servant. But the person who asked probably didn't know the history of AME Church. The church is and always has been the center of African American life . . . a place to call our own in a too-often hostile world, a sanctuary from so many hardships. Over the course of centuries, black churches served as hush harbors, where slaves could worship in safety, praise houses, where their free descendants could gather and shout "Hallelujah" . . . rest stops for the weary along the Underground Railroad, bunkers for the foot soldiers of the civil-rights movement.

There's no better example of this tradition than Mother Emanuel, . . . a church built by blacks seeking liberty, burned to the ground because its founders sought to end slavery only to rise up again, a

199. Barack Obama, Eulogy at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church (2015)

Source: *The White House*.

In the summer of 2015, the nation was shocked by a spate of mass murders, but none created so much consternation and grief as the murder of nine black parishioners in a black church in Charleston by a white

phoenix from these ashes. When there were laws banning all-black church gatherers, services happened here anyway in defiance of unjust laws. When there was a righteous movement to dismantle Jim Crow, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. preached from its pulpit, and marches began from its steps.

A sacred place, this church, not just for blacks, not just for Christians but for every American who cares about the steady expansion... of human rights and human dignity in this country, a foundation stone for liberty and justice for all.

We do not know whether the killer of Reverend Pinckney and eight others knew all of this history, but he surely sensed the meaning of his violent act. It was an act that drew on a long history of bombs and arson and shots fired at churches, not random but as a means of control, a way to terrorize and oppress..., an act that he presumed would deepen divisions that trace back to our nation's original sin....

For too long, we were blind to the pain that the Confederate Flag stirred into many of our citizens. It's true a flag did not cause these murders. But... as we all have to acknowledge, the flag has always represented more than just ancestral pride. For many, black and white, that flag was a reminder of systemic oppression... and racial subjugation.

We see that now. Removing the flag from this state's capital would not be an act of political correctness. It would not be an insult to the valor of Confederate soldiers. It would simply be acknowledgment that the cause for which they fought, the cause of slavery, was wrong. The imposition of Jim Crow after the Civil War, the resistance to civil rights for all people was wrong. It would be one step in an honest accounting of America's history, a modest but meaningful balm for so many unhealed wounds....

For too long, we've been blind to the way past injustices continue to shape the present. Perhaps we see that now. Perhaps this tragedy causes us to ask some tough questions about how we can permit so many of our children to languish in poverty... or attend dilapi-

dated schools or grow up without prospects for a job or for a career. Perhaps it causes us to examine what we're doing to cause some of our children to hate. Perhaps it softens hearts towards those lost young men, tens and tens of thousands caught up in the criminal-justice system and lead us to make sure that that system's not infected with bias....

Maybe we now realize the way a racial bias can infect us even when we don't realize it so that we're guarding against not just racial slurs but we're also guarding against the subtle impulse to call Johnny back for a job interview but not Jamal... so that we search our hearts when we consider laws to make it harder for some of our fellow citizens to vote by recognizing our common humanity....

None of us can or should expect a transformation in race relations overnight.... Whatever solutions we find will necessarily be incomplete. But it would be a betrayal of everything Reverend Pinckney stood for, I believe, if we allow ourselves to slip into a comfortable silence again.... That's what we so often do to avoid uncomfortable truths about the prejudice that still infects our society.... What is true in the south is true for America. Clem understood that justice grows out of recognition of ourselves in each other; that my liberty depends on you being free, too.

*Moral
issue*

Questions

1. Why does President Obama believe that the freedom of some Americans is interconnected with the freedom of others?
2. What does this document, along with the previous one, suggest about how much has changed in American life in the past half-century and how much has not changed?