

*U.S. reaches \$88 million
settlement for Black victims of
white supremacist*



Dylann Roof, the white supremacist who shot dead nine Black churchgoers is escorted from the Shelby Police Department in Shelby Thursday, June 18, 2015 [Chuck Burton/AP Photo]

Washington, October 29 (RHC)-- The U.S. Department of Justice announced an \$88 million settlement on Thursday with victims of a white supremacist who shot dead nine Black churchgoers in South Carolina in 2015.

The settlement stems from allegations that the FBI was negligent when it failed to prohibit the sale of a gun by a licensed firearms dealer to the attacker, Dylan Roof, the Department of Justice said.

Roof, 27, a self-proclaimed white supremacist, who wanted to start a “race war” has been sentenced to death for the massacre at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston. He was convicted in December 2016 on 33 federal counts including hate crimes resulting in death. He later pleaded guilty to nine state charges of murder, in order to avoid the death penalty in those cases.

On the evening of the killings, Roof, then 21, had joined a Wednesday Bible study group at the church before gunning down those praying. He was later found to have a website with photos of himself posing with neo-Nazi and white supremacy symbols.

“The mass shooting at Mother Emanuel AME Church was a horrific hate crime that caused immeasurable suffering for the families of the victims and the survivors,” Attorney General Merrick Garland said, announcing the settlement. “Since the day of the shooting, the Justice Department has sought to bring justice to the community, first by a successful hate crime prosecution and today by settling civil claims.”

Bakari Sellers, a lawyer who helped broker the agreement, told The Associated Press the “88” figure was purposeful. It is a number typically associated with white supremacy and the number of bullets Roof said he had taken with him to the attack.

Months before the June 17, 2015 church shooting, Roof was arrested on February 28, 2015 by Columbia, South Carolina police on the drug possession charge. But a series of clerical errors and missteps allowed Roof to buy the handgun he later used in the massacre.

The litigation began in 2016 and continued through district court and the federal court of appeals, the department said. The lawsuit for a time was thrown out, with a judge writing that an examiner followed procedures but also blasting the federal government for what he called its “abysmally poor policy choices” in how it runs the national database for firearm background checks. The suit was subsequently reinstated by a federal appeals court.

The Department of Justice said the settlement resolved claims from the families of the nine victims of the shooting and from the five survivors who were inside the church at the time of the shooting.

It said the settlements range from \$6 million to \$7.5 million for relatives of the nine victims and \$5 million each for the five survivors. The families of the “Emanuel Nine” and the survivors sued the government for wrongful death and physical injuries.

They claimed the FBI’s National Instant Criminal Background Checks System failed to discover in a timely manner that Roof was prohibited by federal law from possessing a firearm. “The department hopes that these settlements, combined with its prosecution of the shooter will bring some modicum of justice to the victims of this heinous act of hate,” said Associate Attorney General Vanita Gupta.

Those murdered included the Reverend Clementa Pinckney, pastor of the AME Emanuel Church, a state senator, as well as other pillars of the community. They all shared deep devotion to the church, known as Mother Emanuel, and passed that faith along to their families, many of whom offered Roof forgiveness when he appeared in court just days after the attack.

The FBI has acknowledged that Roof’s drug possession arrest should have prevented him from buying a gun.



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