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Oak Creek Community Marks Two Years since Sikh Temple Shooting

By Deepa Iyer

What we would all soon come to learn is that on August 5, 2012, [a gunman with ties to white supremacist organizations](#) walked into the Sikh Temple of Wisconsin and [began a rampage](#) which killed six people, wounded many, and [terrorized an entire community](#).

Over the past few days, hundreds of people have been gathering in Oak Creek, Wisconsin to take part in a series of events organized by youth and civic leaders to mark the second anniversary of the tragedy. I joined them to honor the memories of those who were killed, and to learn about how we can better address - and ultimately prevent – hate violence in our country.

Like communities in Aurora and Newtown, also ravaged by gun violence in 2012, the people of Oak Creek have been in a cycle of grieving and rebuilding over the past two years. But what sets this community apart is the added element of racial targeting that was at play there: a vicious combination of racial anxiety and post-9/11 animus that requires an additional and unique set of responses and interventions from all of us.

Racism was undeniably part of shooter [Wade Michael Page](#)'s twisted motivation. He targeted the temple on a Sunday afternoon when the gurdwara's halls were full of worshippers. The Sikhs settling in Milwaukee and its suburbs reflect the demographic changes in America that are part of the inspirational fuel for [hate groups](#) like the ones Page joined.

In fact, according to the [Southern Poverty Law Center](#), the number of hate groups has increased since 2000, shaped in part by anxiety over the country's rapidly transforming racial landscape. [According to the FBI's data for 2012](#), most hate crimes are motivated by race, accounting for 48 percent of all such reports.

Sikh, Muslim, South Asian and Arab-American communities have an additional element to contend with: greater scrutiny and suspicion after the 9/11 attacks. I have heard from many community members who tell me they are [routinely targeted](#), whether being

secondarily screened at an airport, harassed for wearing a hijab or turban, or surveilled by authorities in their places of worship, student or community gatherings.

How can we better serve these communities in the crosshairs? The tragedy at Oak Creek provides some lessons.

In the wake of violence in Wisconsin, local and government leaders found themselves confronting a host of issues ranging from legal to social, and getting creative to find answers.

The [Sikh Healing Collective](#) was formed to address the mental health and trauma needs with resources that integrate language, cultural and faith norms, especially to assist the children who lost parents in the shooting, or witnessed unspeakable violence while hiding in the gurdwara's basement and kitchen pantry during the massacre.

Young Sikh Americans like Mandeep Kaur and Rahul Dubey began to take leadership positions both within the gurdwara and with non-Sikh groups, to better build partnerships and address the community's needs as a whole. Similarly, Oak Creek Mayor Steve Scaffidi has plans to build connections between various race and faith groups in town with interfaith organizations and events.

And buoyed by the testimony of [Harpreet Singh Saini before the Senate Judiciary Committee](#) about losing his mother in the massacre, organizations around the country came together to successfully advocate Department of Justice to [include categories of Sikh, Arab and Hindu](#) in tracking hate crimes at the federal level.

In order to be effective, the responses to Oak Creek's tragedy had to be unique, multi-layered, and reflect an understanding of the complicated forces in this specific community. As we search for ways to prevent this sort of attack from happening again, our interventions should be similarly unique, multi-layered, and reflective of the community we hope to serve.

Based on my discussions with the families in Oak Creek and advocates around the country, I believe there are a range of resources that stakeholders can put into place to address not just the consequences, but the very roots of hate violence.

Task forces should be regionally coordinated to focus on the specific type of post-9/11 hate violence that affects Sikh, Muslim, South Asian and Arab Americans. Resources

should have the cultural and linguistic capability to be effective in this space, not just for legal, medical, and immigration needs but for the currents of isolation, adjustment, and fear that often run through these communities. And we need better research and tracking of the hate groups that commit these sorts of attacks, not just the crimes after they're committed.

I'd like to see us, as a country, address the root cause of hate violence in our rapidly changing cities, schools, and workplaces in a proactive way, rather than a reactionary one. More than ever, it is important for us to understand each other's stories, experiences, and values, and to find the common threads among them. Government, civic, faith, education and business leaders must come together to create community-based initiatives that promote understanding and partnerships between residents of various backgrounds.

This week, the community in Oak Creek remembers the six who lost their lives - **Satwant Singh Kaleka, Paramjit Kaur, Suveg Singh Khattrra, Prakash Singh, Ranjit Singh, Sita Singh**. Around the country, let us turn our thoughts towards Oak Creek as well, and recommit to creating safer spaces and welcoming communities, free of the threat of violence in any form.

Reuters

Thu Apr 9, 2015 6:14pm EDT

South Carolina officer [Ofc. Michael Slager]dismissed after shooting man in back [Mr Walter Scott]
NORTH CHARLESTON, S.C. | BY HARRIET MCLEOD

President Obama's Statement after the Church Murders 06 18 15

The president highlighted the racial aspect of the killings, saying the fact that the shootings took place in a black church "also raises questions about a dark part of our history."

"This is not the first time that black churches have been attacked," Mr. Obama said. "We know that hatred across races and faiths pose a particular threat to our democracy and our ideals."

He said he's confident that the outpouring of support "from all races from all faiths, from all places of worship, indicates the degree to which those old vestiges of hatred can be overcome."

Referring to the church's historic role in the abolition and civil-rights movements, Mr. Obama called the house of worship "a sacred place in the history of Charleston and in the history of America."

“This is a place of worship that was founded by African-Americans seeking liberty,” he said. “This is a church that was burned to the ground because its worshipers worked to end slavery. When there were laws banning all black church gatherings, they conducted services in secret. When there was a nonviolent movement to bring our country closer in line with our highest ideals, some of our brightest leaders spoke and led marches from this church’s steps.”

Read more: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/jun/18/obama-calls-gun-control-wake-senseless-sc-church-m/#ixzz3dRGbpNGG>

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I have to do it,” the gunman was quoted as saying. “You rape our women and you’re taking over our country. And you have to go.”

Calling the shooting the work of “a hateful and deranged mind,” Mayor Joseph P. Riley Jr. said it was hard to imagine churchgoers at “a prayer service and a Bible service, and they’re speaking about the Holy Scriptures and praying,” while someone is “sitting there contemplating the act of murder.”

We woke up today and the heart and soul of South Carolina was broken,” Gov. [Nikki Haley](#) said through tears at a news conference.

Later at a vigil, Governor Haley said: “When hate happens, we come together, and that’s what we’ll do. So right now we grieve. And then we’ll heal. And when we heal, we end up stronger than we started.”

Obama denounces 'outrageous murders' of three U.S. Muslims
Reuters



By **Colleen Jenkins** February 13, 2015 5:50 PM

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (Reuters) - U.S. President Barack Obama on Friday described the deaths of three young Muslims gunned down in North Carolina this week as "brutal and outrageous murders" and said no one in the United States should be targeted for their religion.

The president's statement came as the U.S. Justice Department said it would join the FBI's preliminary inquiry to determine whether the man accused in the Chapel Hill shooting on Tuesday broke any federal laws, including hate crime laws.

"No one in the United States of America should ever be targeted because of who they are, what they look like, or how they worship," Obama said in a statement, offering his condolences to the victims' families.

The families had called on Obama to insist that federal authorities investigate whether the murder suspect, 46-year-old paralegal student Craig Stephen Hicks, was motivated by hatred toward the victims because they were Muslim.

Police seized more than a dozen firearms and a large amount of ammunition from his home, according to search warrants filed on Friday, WRAL-TV reported.

Newlywed Deah Shaddy Barakat, 23, a University of North Carolina dental student, his wife, Yusor Mohammad Abu-Salha, 21, and her sister, Razan Mohammad Abu-Salha, 19, a student at North Carolina State University, were killed in a condominium about two miles (three km) from the UNC campus.

According to the warrants, a friend of the victims' stopped police and directed them to the condo, where authorities found Barakat dead and bleeding from his head in the front doorway, the television station reported.

One of the sisters was found in the kitchen and the other in its doorway, according WRAL-TV.

Good afternoon, everybody. This morning, I spoke with, and Vice President Biden spoke with, Mayor Joe Riley and other leaders of Charleston to express our deep sorrow over the senseless murders that took place last night.

Michelle and I know several members of Emanuel AME Church. We knew their pastor, Reverend Clementa Pinckney, who, along with eight others, gathered in prayer and fellowship and was murdered last night. And to say our thoughts and prayers are with them and their families, and their community doesn't say enough to convey the heartache and the sadness and the anger that we feel.

Any death of this sort is a tragedy. Any shooting involving multiple victims is a tragedy.

There is something particularly heartbreaking about the death happening in a place in which we seek solace and we seek peace, in a place of worship.

Mother Emanuel is, in fact, more than a church. This is a place of worship that was founded by African Americans seeking liberty. This is a church that was burned to the ground because its worshipers worked to end slavery. When there were laws banning all-black church gatherings, they conducted services in secret. When there was a nonviolent movement to bring our country closer in line with our highest ideals, some of our brightest leaders spoke and led marches from this church's steps. This is a sacred place in the history of Charleston and in the history of America.

The FBI is now on the scene with local police, and more of the Bureau's best are on the way to join them. The Attorney General has announced plans for the FBI to open a hate crime investigation. We understand that the suspect is in custody. And I'll let the best of law enforcement do its work to make sure that justice is served.

Until the investigation is complete, I'm necessarily constrained in terms of talking about the details of the case. But I don't need to be constrained about the emotions that tragedies like this raise. I've had to make statements like this too many times. Communities like this have had to endure tragedies like this too many times.

We don't have all the facts, but we do know that, once again, innocent people were killed in part because someone who wanted to inflict harm had no trouble getting their hands on a gun.

Now is the time for mourning and for healing. But let's be clear:

At some point, we as a country will have to reckon with the fact that this type of mass violence does not happen in other advanced countries. It doesn't happen in other places with this kind of frequency. And it is in our power to do something about it.

I say that recognizing the politics in this town foreclose a lot of those avenues right now. But it would be wrong for us not to acknowledge it. And at some point it's going to be important for the American people to come to grips with it, and for us to be able to shift how we think about the issue of gun violence collectively.

The fact that this took place in a black church obviously also raises questions about a dark part of our history. This is not the first time that black churches have been attacked. And we know that hatred across races and faiths pose a particular threat to our democracy and our ideals.

The good news is I am confident that the outpouring of unity and strength and fellowship and love across Charleston today, from all races, from all faiths, from all places of worship indicates the degree to which those old vestiges of hatred can be overcome. That, certainly, was Dr. King's hope just over 50 years ago, after four little girls were killed in a bombing in a black church in Birmingham, Alabama.

He said they lived meaningful lives, and they died nobly. **“They say to each of us,” Dr. King said, “black and white alike, that we must substitute courage for caution. They say to us that we must be concerned not merely with [about] who murdered them, but about the system, the way of life, the philosophy which produced the murderers. Their death says to us that we must work passionately and unrelentingly for the realization of the American Dream.**

“And if one will hold on, he will discover that God walks with him, and that God is able to lift you from the fatigue of despair to the buoyancy of hope, and transform dark and desolate valleys into sunlit paths of inner peace.”

Reverend Pinckney and his congregation understood that spirit. Their Christian faith compelled them to reach out not just to members of their congregation, or to members of their own communities, but to all in need. They opened their doors to strangers who might enter a church in search of healing or redemption.

Mother Emanuel church and its congregation have risen before — from flames, from an earthquake, from other dark times — to give hope to generations of Charlestonians.

And with our prayers and our love, and the buoyancy of hope, it will rise again now as a place of peace.