

# Race, Terror and “Identity Politics”

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## Pittsburgh Shooting and Other Cases Point to Rise in Domestic Extremism

- [Download Transcript](#) October 30, 2018 Heard on [All Things Considered](#)

SOURCE: <https://www.npr.org/2018/10/30/662233666/pittsburgh-shooting-and-other-cases-again-point-to-domestic-extremism>

ARI SHAPIRO, HOST:

In just the past week, we've seen three high-profile cases of domestic extremism; two were deadly shootings, one at the synagogue in Pittsburgh, the other at a grocery store in Louisville, Ky. The third was the explosives sent through the mail to a prominent Democrat. All three of the suspects now in custody are men born here in the U.S. NPR's Greg Myre joins us now to talk about the common threads between these incidents. Hey, Greg.

GREG MYRE, BYLINE: Hey, Ari.

SHAPIRO: We hear so much about international terrorism and efforts to stop people from other countries. These incidents are all homegrown. How common is that?

MYRE: Absolutely. You know, 9/11 really concentrated the mind on radical Islam from abroad. But the numbers since then tell a very different story. Deadly attacks by the far-right white supremacists outnumber those by Muslim extremists by a ratio of 3 to 1, about 70 attacks versus 23. The death toll in the past 17 years - about the same - about 125 on both sides here. The far right tends to target small minorities in smaller numbers than the indiscriminate attacks that many of the radical Muslims have carried out.

SHAPIRO: And when you look at the three people who are accused of these attacks in the last week, they all look similar to each other - men born in the U.S. Should we read something into that? Is this the new face of extremism?

MYRE: It's sort of been the face of extremism. These are American men acting on their own and they account for a solid majority of extremist attacks - really started picking up about a decade ago. The man accused in Pittsburgh made anti-Semitic remarks on social media. The Louisville suspect had a reputation for racist comments and the mail bomb suspect in Florida always told worker co-workers that he admired Hitler and thought that gays and Jews and blacks should be eliminated. I spoke to Bill Braniff, the director of the START consortium at the University of Maryland. They study terrorism, and his research points to this far-right obsession that white Americans are at risk.

WILLIAM BRANIFF: What are the characteristics of an individual that sort of allow them to go from nonviolence in support of one of these ideologies to violence? And we find that believing in this collective sense of victimhood is a near-necessary condition.

SHAPIRO: Greg, we've seen so much in the way of government efforts to fight Islamic extremism. Is there the same effort to stop this kind of domestic far-right extremism?

MYRE: Probably not the same level. Christopher Wray, the FBI director, was before Congress just a couple weeks ago. He said Islamist extremism - he still sees that as the greatest threat. But then he noted very quickly there are a thousand active investigations inside the U.S. And he said this covers everything from right to left and everything in between. He didn't break it down further than that, but he specifically said this was not Islamic extremists he was talking about here. And the challenge, of course, is how do you find people? There are - is the social media trail. But there are so many American men expressing the thoughts these days, it's hard to tell who will act and who's just ranting.

SHAPIRO: We're going to hear more in a moment about one social media site that's become a platform for these rants. But first, the FBI is describing the scope of the problem. What is it and the Trump administration more broadly doing about it?

MYRE: The Trump administration hasn't shown a lot of interest. The Obama administration created a program, Countering Violent Extremism, giving grants to local groups to prevent radicalization. The Trump administration has cut that way back and hasn't really focused on far-right threats despite the growing numbers of attacks.

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## Gunman Kills 6 at a Sikh Temple Near Milwaukee

By STEVEN YACCINO, [MICHAEL SCHWIRTZ](#) and [MARC SANTORA](#) AUG. 5, 2012

SOURCE: <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/06/us/shooting-reported-at-temple-in-wisconsin.html>

OAK CREEK, Wis. — The priests had gathered in the lobby of the sprawling Sikh temple [gurdwara] here in suburban Milwaukee, and lunch was being prepared as congregants were arriving for Sunday services.

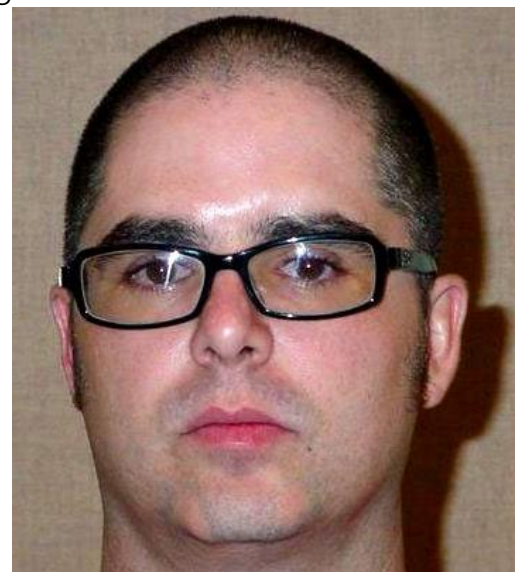
Instead of worshipers, though, an armed man stepped through the door and started firing.

In an attack that the police said they were treating as "a domestic terrorist-type incident," the gunman stalked through the temple around 10:30 a.m. Congregants ran for shelter and barricaded themselves in bathrooms and prayer halls, where they made desperate phone calls and sent anguished texts pleading for help as confusion and fear took hold. Witnesses described a scene of chaos and carnage.

[...]

Six people were killed and three others were wounded on Sunday at the 17,000-square-foot [Sikh Temple of Wisconsin](#) in Oak Creek, a city of about 35,000 just south of Milwaukee, officials said.

The gunman's [Wade Michael Page] rampage ended when one of the first police officers to arrive shot and killed him. Another police officer, who tried to aid a victim, was ambushed by the gunman and shot multiple times. He was in



critical condition but was expected to survive, the authorities said.

[...]

Many members of the close-knit Sikh community here said the attack had shattered their sense of security.

"Everyone here is thinking this is a hate crime for sure," said Manjit Singh, who goes to a different temple in the region. "People think we are Muslims."

Though violence against Sikhs in Wisconsin was unheard of before the shooting, many in this community said they had sensed a rise in antipathy since the attacks on Sept. 11 and suspected it was because people mistake them for Muslims. Followers of Sikhism, or Gurmat, a monotheistic faith founded in the 15th century in South Asia, typically do not cut their hair, and men often wear colorful turbans and refrain from cutting their beards.

[...]

There are around 314,000 Sikhs in the United States, according to the [Association of Religion Data Archives](#). The temple in Oak Creek, one of two large congregations in the Milwaukee area, was founded in 1997 and has about 400 worshipers.

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## Dylann Roof sentenced to death for killing 9 black church members

SOURCE: <https://abc13.com/news/dylann-roof-sentenced-to-death-for-church-killings/1696005/>

Tuesday, January 10, 2017 CHARLESTON, SC

Dylann Roof [white supremacist] was sentenced to death Tuesday for killing nine black church members during Bible study in a racially motivated attack, the first person to face execution for federal hate crime convictions.

[...]

Roof told FBI agents when they arrested him a day after the **June 17, 2015**, slayings that he wanted the shootings to bring back segregation or perhaps start a race war. Instead, the slayings had a unifying effect, as South Carolina removed the Confederate flag from its Statehouse for the first time in more than 50 years and other states followed suit, taking down Confederate banners and monuments. Roof had posed with the flag in photos.

The attacker specifically picked out Emanuel AME Church, the South's oldest black church, to carry out the cold, calculated slaughter, Assistant U.S. Attorney Jay Richardson said.

The 12 people Roof targeted opened the door for a



stranger with a smile, he said. Three people survived the attack.

"They welcomed a 13th person that night ... with a kind word, a Bible, a handout and a chair," Richardson said during his closing argument. "He had come with a hateful heart and a Glock .45."

The gunman sat with the Bible study group for about 45 minutes. During the final prayer - when everyone's eyes were closed - he started firing. He stood over some of the fallen victims, shooting them again as they lay on the floor, Richardson said.

[...]

Roof did not explain his actions to jurors, saying only that "anyone who hates anything in their mind has a good reason for it."

[...]

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## **Bissonnette's guilty plea not enough. We need to know why**

Alexandre Bissonnette has spared us having to relive the horrors of his mosque shooting spree, but his crimes cast a long shadow over Quebec

[Allison Hanes, Montreal Gazette](#) Updated: March 29, 2018

SOURCE: <https://montrealgazette.com/opinion/columnists/allison-hanes-bissonnettes-guilty-plea-not-enough-we-need-to-know-why>

Hateful ideas, mental instability and guns.

That lethal combination seems to be what motivated Alexandre Bissonnette to walk into a Quebec City mosque just over a year ago **[January 29, 2017]** and open fire on worshippers as they finished their evening prayers. Or at least that's what we are left to conclude.

Bissonnette took responsibility for his shocking crime Wednesday, pleading guilty to the murders of [Azzedine Soufiane](#), [Ibrahima Barry](#), [Mamadou Tanou Barry](#), [Khaled Belkacemi](#), [Abdelkrim Hassane](#) and [Aboubaker Thabti](#).

The mass killing injured many others, paralyzed one, turned six wives into widows, orphaned 17 children and left the Muslim community reeling. His actions also forced a reckoning in Quebec society about the consequences of a decade of divisive rhetoric and identity politics about the accommodation of minorities — lessons we are still struggling to comprehend.

[Bissonnette's guilty plea](#) will spare the survivors, victims' families — and all of us, really — having to relive the tragedy during trial, a prospect that threatened to rip open fresh wounds. But we are now left to try to comprehend an evil deed that Bissonnette himself admits was "unforgivable."





Why did he walk into *that* mosque, the Centre culturel islamique du Québec, on that frigid night in late January 2017? Why did he open fire on *those* men finishing their evening prayers on a snowy Sunday night? [...]

A newly released part of the warrants states that [Bissonnette's mother told police](#) he sympathized with U.S. President Donald Trump on blocking immigration.

Bissonnette's shooting spree occurred as the far-right was beginning to emerge from the shadows after Trump's election normalized xenophobic rhetoric and just as the new president took his first steps to try [to ban travellers](#) from

The six victims of a shooting at a Quebec City mosque, Sunday, Jan. 29, 2017. (Top row, from left): Azzeddine Soufiane, 57, was a grocer and butcher, and father of three. He had opened one of the first community businesses in Quebec City and had lived in Quebec for the past 30 years. Khaled Belkacemi, 60, was a professor in the food science department at Université Laval. He had left his native country Algeria to give his family a chance to live "far away from horror," said his son Amir. Belkacemi was married to another professor in the department and had three children. Aboubaker Thabti, 44, worked in a pharmacy and had two young children with his wife. They lived about five minutes from the mosque. (Bottom row, from left): Abdelkrim Hassane, 41, was a father with three daughters and a wife. He worked in information technology for the government. Mamadou Tanou Barry, 42, was a father of two boys and supported not just his family in Quebec, but his extended family in Guinea, Africa. He was very close to another victim (they hailed from the same village in Africa) - Ibrahim Barry. Ibrahim Barry, 39, was a father of four and worked in information technology at the health insurance board of Quebec. Like his fellow Guinean Mamadou Tanou Barry, he also supported both his family in Canada and in Africa.

SOURCE: "Allison Hanes on the Quebec mosque shooting: Remember their names" <https://montrealgazette.com/opinion/columnists/allison-hanes-remember-their-names>

predominantly Muslim countries.

It took years after 14 female engineering students were [murdered at École Polytechnique](#) to admit that the gunman was motivated by hatred of women. If we are to believe Bissonnette, that would put us in similar in denial now.

[...]

## When White Supremacists Target the Black Elderly

By [Zak Cheney-Rice](#) Oct. 28, 2018

SOURCE: <http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2018/10/white-supremacist-shooting-in-louisville-kentucky-kroger.html>

Two black senior citizens were murdered in Louisville, Kentucky, on Thursday **October 25, 2018**. Maurice Stallard, 69, was at a Kroger supermarket when Gregory Bush, a 51-year-old white man, walked in and shot him multiple times. Bush then exited the store and shot Vickie Lee Jones, 67, in the parking lot before an armed bystander reportedly fired back, prompting him to flee. Police were unable to confirm accounts that Bush encountered a second armed man, who engaged him in a brief standoff where no shots were fired, [according to the New York Times](#). "Don't shoot me and I won't shoot you," the man's son, [Steve Zinninger](#), claimed Bush told his father. "Whites don't kill whites." Police apprehended Bush minutes later.

Bush had no known connection to either of his victims. Any doubt of a racial motive seemed quelled when surveillance footage showed the shooter forcibly tried to enter a black church minutes before moving on to the supermarket. The *Times* reports that a member of the 185-year-old First Baptist Church of Jeffersontown grew alarmed when she saw Bush yanking "aggressively" at its locked front doors. Up to ten people were inside the chapel following a midweek service. "I'm just thankful that all of our doors and security was in place," church administrator Billy Williams [said](#).

The murder of black seniors is a relatively rare phenomenon in the U.S. People over 65 [accounted for just 2 percent](#) of black homicide victims in 2014, according to a 2017 Violence Policy Center report, citing that year as the most recent for which data was available. Yet they have been central victims in recent racist killings. From [Charleston](#) to [New York City](#) and, now, possibly Louisville, some of the 21st century's most notorious white supremacists have targeted black seniors for violent deaths. The unique cruelty of this pattern magnifies its obvious illogic, demonstrating yet again that white rhetoric framing black people as threats is shallow cover for terrorizing the vulnerable.

It also casts harsh light on the canards used to deflect reckoning with racist violence among partisan pundits. Arguments that police brutality claims are overblown, and that "[black-on-black crime](#)" is the more pressing issue, can make interracial violence a tough sell as worthy of national attention — if mostly for conservatives seeking to avoid confronting racism altogether. Yet their reasoning rarely cuts both ways. Terrorist attacks by Muslim refugees have not happened in the U.S., yet their specter fueled President Donald Trump's election. Violent crime committed by undocumented immigrants is rare, but as a rhetorical device, it is among the central Republican wedge issues of the upcoming midterm elections.



The reality is that there has long been a tacit understanding in America that some forms of violence are more morally objectionable than others, regardless of their frequency. That this understanding is often weaponized to promote xenophobia and white supremacy belies that it also has appropriate applications. Black Americans have been targeted for centuries of enslavement and racial violence. Black people in their 60s are among the last generation who lived through and remember Jim Crow. Maurice Stallard was about five years old when *Brown v. Board of Education* was decided and a teenager when the Voting Rights Act passed in 1965. Vickie Lee Jones was five when the Montgomery Bus Boycotts ended. She was close to 13 when white terrorists in Birmingham, Alabama, murdered four little black girls in a church.

If anything constitutes a uniquely repugnant act of violence, white racists murdering black Americans who endured the 20th century's banner period of white racist violence in the U.S. and lived to tell of it qualifies. Yet we continue to see it unfold — and remarkably, often justified using the rhetoric of defense. "Y'all are raping our white women. Y'all are taking over the world," [shouted Dylann Roof](#) as he massacred nine black people at a church in Charleston, South Carolina, in 2015. White supremacist James Jackson, who initially hoped to kill "younger [black] guys" who "put white girls on the wrong path," settled for stabbing Timothy Caughman to death with a sword in New York City in 2017. "The white race is being eroded," he later [said](#).

Caughman was 66 when he was killed. Ethel Lee Lance was 70, Daniel Simmons was 74, and Susie Jackson was 87 when Roof murdered them in purported defense of his race. At 69 and 67, respectively, Stallard and Jones are the latest to join their cohort. And their number could have easily been larger. Had Bush succeeded in breaking into the church — a place of black worship, black community, and at its best, black sanctuary — more potential victims awaited. White violence against black people has always been about power, first and foremost, and rationalized by invoking fabricated threats. But the wholesale massacre of unsuspecting black senior citizens better reflects its true rationale. Terrorism is most effective when it targets those least able to fight back.

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## Pittsburgh synagogue gunman said he wanted all Jews to die, criminal complaint says

By Nicole Chavez, Emanuella Grinberg and Elliott C. McLaughlin, CNN Mon October 29, 2018

SOURCE: <https://www.cnn.com/2018/10/28/us/pittsburgh-synagogue-shooting/index.html>

The American Jewish community is in mourning after a gunman killed 11 worshippers Saturday morning **[October 27, 2018]** in a Pittsburgh synagogue in the deadliest attack ever on Jews in the United States.

Jewish organizations said the violence at Tree of Life synagogue underscored the dangers of unchecked hatred in a time when anti-Semitic acts are on the rise.

According to law enforcement, suspect [Robert Bowers](#) targeted Jews online and made anti-Semitic comments during the shooting. While receiving medical care, he told a SWAT officer that he wanted all Jews to die, according to a criminal complaint.

Bowers, whom authorities believe acted alone, faces 29 federal charges, some of which are punishable by death. The US attorney in Pittsburgh, Scott Brady, is seeking approval from Attorney General Jeff Sessions to seek the death penalty against Bowers, according to a Justice Department spokesman.

<https://www.cnn.com/2018/10/28/us/pittsburgh-synagogue-shooting-vigil/index.html>

[...]

### A trail of hate leads to suspect

Sunday's vigil, the second since the Saturday morning shooting, came as a fuller picture began to emerge of the suspect. The



46-year-old resident of suburban Baldwin was taken into custody after a shootout with police. He is being treated in a hospital for gunshot wounds.

"They're committing genocide to my people," Bowers told police during the shootout, according to an FBI affidavit. "I just want to kill Jews."

[...]

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## Oklahoma City Bombing

Two EuroAmerican terrorists, Timothy McVeigh (a native of Lockport, New York) and Terry Lynn Nichols (a native of Lapeer, Michigan) set off a powerful truck bomb just outside the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City on **April 19, 1995** at around 9:00 in the morning.

Their objective was to demolish the building in order to kill its occupants. 168 people died, including children, and many more were injured. Their terrorism was motivated by their hatred of the Federal Government who they saw as violating the constitutional rights of the citizenry (classic examples, in their view, were the deadly confrontations at Ruby Ridge, Idaho in 1992 and Waco, Texas, the following year—provoked they felt by the heavy hand of Federal agents).

Typically, without even a hint of any evidence, the media initially brought out the story that the bombing was the work of terrorists from the Middle East.

