

An Addendum by Patricia Sunderland: Witnessing and Speaking Charleston

On the evening of June 17th, the murder of nine African Americans took place at the Emanuel AME church in Charleston, South Carolina. My [Rachel Dolezal post](#) was written the night before, completed perhaps just a few hours before the tragic loss of lives that simultaneously rendered a discussion of US racial and ethnic identity formation both more important and trivial.

On June 19th, I traveled to Charleston. It was a pre-planned trip. My mother, my brother and his family live in Charleston; I was going to visit. But being there allowed me to pay tribute and bear witness to the tragedy in some small part by taking part in the Unity march on the Arthur Ravenel, Jr. bridge on June 21, followed by a visit to the Emanuel AME Church. I wanted to share a few photographs, messages, and videotaped moments from that night.

Sentiments of the power of love in the face of hate and strength garnered through faith were not just visible in the written messages, but virtually palpable in the moment. [This video](#), recorded around 11pm, conveys that feeling in part through a moving rendition of "Lean on Me" and ends with an explicit statement of the feeling of the energy in the moment, including the energy of standing together against racism.

The march on the bridge, earlier in the evening, was explicitly dedicated to theme of unity. [As this short video](#) from the bridge as well the photographs below show, there were many demonstrations of unity in the moment, combined here with the palpable sense of being part of a moment of historical significance in which it also seemed that virtually everyone was simultaneously participant and observer as well as documented and documenter, aided and abetted, as I was, by the camera in my phone.

This tragedy in Charleston moved the state of South Carolina and the nation. We have witnessed the removal of the Confederate flag from the South Carolina statehouse, the plea for which was part of the messages amidst the flowers at the church.

The demonstrations of forgiveness, enigmatic for many, also deserve to be understood. If family members' forgiveness was clearly forged in the particular constellations of religious lives, one must also consider the central placement of Charleston in the history of slavery and racism, and the relations of white and black people and the lives of black people in the United States now. As [Roxane Gay](#) has pointed out, forgiveness is also a matter of survival.

Signs held by unity marchers reminded that Black Lives Matter and White Silence = White Consent. We should not forget and we should speak, in tribute to Rev. Sharonda Coleman-Singleton, Rev. DePayne Middleton-Doctor, Cynthia Hurd, Susie Jackson, Ethel Lance, Rev. Clementa C. Pinckney, Tywanza Sanders, Rev. Daniel L. Simmons, Sr., and Myra Thompson, the nine who lost their lives in Charleston.