

# **At church, Biden denounces ‘poison’ of white supremacy**

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CHARLESTON, S.C. (RNS)—President Joe Biden denounced the white supremacy he said led to deadly violence at Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church almost nine years ago.

“The word of God was pierced by bullets and hate and rage, propelled by not just gunpowder, but by a poison, a poison that has for too long haunted this nation,” he said in an address Jan. 8 at the historically Black church. In 2015, nine people died there at the hands of a gun-carrying white supremacist church members had welcomed to their Bible study.

“What is that poison? White supremacy. All it is is a poison. Throughout our history, it’s ripped this nation apart. This has no place in America. Not today, tomorrow or ever.”

In his campaign appearance that mixed Scripture with election rhetoric, Biden spoke about his record of affirming African Americans and Black history. He cited his nomination of Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson and other Black women to federal courts, and his establishment of the Juneteenth holiday and a national monument that honors lynching victim Emmett Till and his mother, Mamie Till.

Without calling Donald Trump by name, Biden called his Republican opponent a “loser” and, after offering his sympathies and prayers about a recent school shooting in Iowa, criticized Trump for saying, “We have to get over it.”

Biden crossed himself after repeating his opponent’s words and then offered his views.

“My response is: We have to stop it,” he said, drawing applause, “so your children, your family, your friends—you can leave your home, walk the streets, go to stores, go to the grocery store and go to church, to be safe from gun violence. There’s no excuse for this carnage. We have to ban assault weapons. I did it once before, and I’m going to come back again and do it.”

Biden’s remarks were interrupted by pro-Palestinian protesters shouting for a cease-fire in the Israel-Hamas war. In return, people in the pews started calling out “Four More Years.”

“I understand their passion,” Biden responded. “And I’ve been quietly working, been quietly working with the Israeli government to get them to reduce and significantly get out of Gaza, using all that I can to do.”

## **South Carolina primary upcoming**

As he looks ahead to the Democratic primary to be held in South Carolina, Biden credited people in the state—including those at Mother Emanuel and the support of Rep. James Clyburn, D-S.C.—with his 2020 election.

“Your voice was heard in shaping your destiny. That’s democracy. I’m proud to have led the effort to make sure your voice, the South Carolina voice, will always be heard. Because now you’re first in the primary,” he said, drawing more applause.

South Carolina’s Feb. 3 Democratic primary will be the first official 2024 ballot with Biden’s name on it, a change recommended by Biden and other Democrats who wanted the first primary to be held in a more diverse state.

While New Hampshire is still having primaries sooner, Biden’s name will not be on the ballot as the state’s leaders did not opt to follow the national party’s directive to delay their primary until after South Carolina’s. Instead,

Democrats in New Hampshire launched a write-in campaign for Biden, Politico reported.

As he concluded his speech, in which he lauded the patriotism of the Black church, Biden drew on a song popularized by gospel artist James Cleveland—"I Don't Feel No Ways Tired"—to round out themes about truth, democracy and faith.

"This is a time of choosing. So, let us choose the truth. Let us choose America," he said. "I know we can do it together and, as the gospel song sings, 'We've come too far from where we started. Nobody told me the road would be easy. I don't believe he brought me this far to leave me.'

"My fellow Americans, I don't think the good Lord brought us this far to leave us behind."

Two days before Biden's address at Mother Emanuel, Vice President Kamala Harris also visited South Carolina and spoke in a different African Methodist Episcopal setting.

Sounding similar themes as the president, Harris spoke at the annual retreat of the AME Church's Seventh Episcopal District's Women's Missionary Society.

"In moments such as this, when we as a nation witness so much hate, conflict and attempts to divide, it is our faith that often guides us forward," she said, "faith in what we cannot see yet know to be true; faith in the promise of our nation—freedom, liberty and equality—not for some, but for all."