

Charleston Shooting: Suspect in church shooting had apartheid-era patches

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Charleston, South Carolina : Dylann Storm Roof drove around with a Confederate flag on his license plate "representing the pro-slavery South that lost the U.S. civil war. On his Facebook page, he wore a jacket with the flags of the former white-racist regimes of South Africa and Rhodesia.

A picture began to emerge Thursday of the 21-year-old white man arrested in the shooting deaths of nine people during a prayer meeting at a historic black church in Charleston. The Wednesday night attack was decried by stunned community leaders and politicians as a hate crime.

In the hours after the bloodbath, the Southern Poverty Law Center, a civil rights group that tracks hate organizations and extremists, said it was not aware of Roof before the rampage. And some friends said they did not know him to be racist.

"I never thought he'd do something like this," said high school friend Antonio Metze, 19. "He had black friends."

Childhood friend Joey Meek had seen him as recently as Tuesday, said Meek's mother, Kimberly Konzny. She said she didn't know why he was in Charleston and was not aware of his being involved in any church groups or saying anything racist.

"I don't know what was going through his head," Konzny said. "He was a really sweet kid. He was quiet. He only had a few friends."

Joey Meek alerted the FBI after he and mother instantly recognized Roof in a surveillance camera image that was widely circulated after the bloodbath. In the image, Roof had the same stained sweatshirt he wore while playing Xbox videogames in their home recently, Konzny said. It was stained because he had worked at a landscaping and pest control business, she said.

State court records for Roof as an adult show a felony drug arrest from March that was pending against him and a misdemeanor trespassing charge from April. Authorities had no immediate details. As for any earlier offenses, juvenile records are generally sealed in South Carolina.

Court records list no attorney for him.

The president of the Southern Poverty Law Center said the church attack is a reminder of the dangers of homegrown extremism.

"The increase has been driven by a backlash to the country's increasing racial diversity, an increase symbolized for many by the presence of an African American in the White House," he said.

- AP