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Twenty-Five Black Churches in America That Were Bombed or Burned

The Fires That Tried to Silence Black America — and the Faith That Endured



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16th Street Church bombing — Tom Self, Birmingham News, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

The number of Black churches burned or bombed in American history isn't limited to 25. The best historically defensible estimate is several hundred Black churches burned or bombed in America, once you include Reconstruction, Jim Crow, the Civil Rights era, and the 1990s arson wave.

But the exact number is not knowable because:

- Many attacks were never investigated
- Many were never recorded by name

- Some were destroyed during mass racial violence (e.g., Tulsa, Rosewood, Ocoee)
- Federal tracking did not exist until the 1990s

Some of the names might seem familiar for other reasons. Mother Emanuel A.M.E. in Charleston was where Dylann Roof murdered nine people and was later brought to Burger King by police on his way to jail. SCLC leader Ralph Abernathy pastored First Baptist Church in Montgomery. Pilgrim Baptist Church in Chicago is considered the "Birthplace of Gospel music," though other locations in Chicago and elsewhere might beg to differ.

Here are 25 churches and locations where Black churches were targeted. Some multiple times. To keep their message from spreading.

25 Documented Attacks on Black Churches (Name • City/State • Date)

19th–Early 20th Century

1. Emanuel AME Church • Charleston, SC • 1822 (burned after Vesey plot)
2. Greenwood District Churches (multiple Black congregations) • Tulsa, OK • May 31–Jun 1, 1921 (bombed during Tulsa Massacre)

1950s–1960s Civil Rights Era

3. St. James AME Church • Lake City, SC • Oct 5, 1955 (burned)

4. Bethel Baptist Church • Birmingham, AL • Dec 25, 1956 (bombed)

5. Allen Temple AME Church • Bessemer, AL • Apr 28, 1957 (bombed)

6. Bethel Baptist Church (2nd bombing) • Birmingham, AL • Jun 29, 1958

7. Bethel Baptist Church (3rd bombing) • Birmingham, AL • 1962

8. Sixteenth Street Baptist Church • Birmingham, AL • Sep 15, 1963 (bombed; 4 girls killed)

9. St. Paul Methodist Church • Greenville, SC • 1960s (bomb threats/arson attempts)

1970s–1990s

10. First Baptist Church (Black congregation) • Montgomery, AL • multiple attacks (1960s–1970s)

11. Mount Zion AME Church • Greeleyville, SC • Jun 20, 1995 (Klan arson)

12. Macedonia Baptist Church • Bloomville, SC • Jun 16, 1995 (arson)

13. Salem Baptist Church • Knoxville, TN • 1990 (arson)

14. St. Joseph Baptist Church • Springfield, LA • 1992 (arson)

15. Mount Zion Baptist Church • Churchville, SC • 1995 (arson)

16. New Mount Olive Baptist Church • Fort Lauderdale, FL • 1996 (arson)

17. Friendship Baptist Church • Mobile, AL • 1998 (arson)

18. Greater Love Missionary Baptist Church • New Orleans, LA • 1999 (arson)

19. Pilgrim Baptist Church • Chicago, IL • Jan 6, 2006 (fire; landmark Black church)

20. College Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church • Knoxville, TN • 2015 (arson)

21. God's Power Church of Christ • Macon, GA • Jun 23, 2015 (arson)

22. Briar Creek Road Baptist Church • Charlotte, NC • Jun 24, 2015 (arson)

23. Glover Grove Baptist Church • Warrenville, SC • Jun 26, 2015 (fire; suspected arson)

24. Fruitland Presbyterian Church • Fruitland, TN • Jun 30, 2015 (fire)

25. Mount Pleasant Baptist Church — Opelousas, Louisiana (2019) • March 31, 2019. Mount Pleasant Baptist Church — a historic Black congregation founded in 1917 — was burned to the ground in a deliberate arson attack. It was the first of three Black churches torched in St. Landry Parish over ten days.

Conclusion

Across two centuries, the burning and bombing of Black churches in America forms a pattern too consistent to dismiss as isolated crimes. These twenty-five documented attacks — from the destruction of Emanuel AME after the Vesey revolt, to the razing of Greenwood's sanctuaries during the Tulsa Massacre, to the coordinated arsons of the 1990s- trace a single through-line: when Black communities organize, educate, vote, or simply gather in safety, someone eventually tries to set the building on fire.

Black churches have always been more than places of worship. They are archives of survival, schools for political literacy, headquarters for civil rights campaigns, and cultural engines that shaped everything from gospel music to abolitionist organizing. That is precisely why they were targeted. Burning a Black church has never been about the building — it has always been about the people inside and the future they were trying to build.

Remembering these attacks is not an act of nostalgia or grief-tourism. It is a record of what has been done, and a reminder of what must never be allowed again. The story of Black America cannot be told without its churches, and the story of those churches cannot be told without acknowledging the violence directed at them. Yet the deeper truth is this: every time a sanctuary was burned, the congregation rebuilt. Every time a bomb shattered the walls, the community gathered again. The fires were meant to erase them, but instead they revealed what could not be destroyed.

The history of Black churches in America is not a history of buildings lost — it is a history of people who refused to disappear.

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