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Trayvon Martin: Voting Rights Deferred

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To say that America is a sick puppy would be an understatement. To be more accurate, America is a grotesquely obese, cancerous, lumbering behemoth sucking down nicotine as the prescribed cure. That is how I see the Supreme Court's ruling on the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Ignoring the overtly racist strategies of Tea Party-inspired conservatives to suppress the black vote in the 2012 election, it ruled that states-rights-secessionist-confederate wannabes no longer need voting oversight to mend their ways. With the Court's clean bill of health regarding race relations in America, the cancer of the wily beast will likely metastasize.

Simultaneously, there is another court proceeding that has gripped the attention of the nation, and even the world. The Trayvon Martin murder case has viewers addicted to this riveting TV trial like a koala bear hugging a eucalyptus tree. The death of this unarmed black teenager by the hand of white George Zimmerman,[1] a vigilante neighborhood watch commando with a gun, is stirring a racial firestorm that threatens the security of sleepy Sanford, Florida. The Martin tragic murder is a litmus test for race relations in America today. The Supreme Court read the thermometer of America's racism and saw 98.7. The Trayvon Martin case indicates that the reading is at a feverish tipping point.

And here's another test. Picture George Zimmerman black and Trayvon Martin white. An armed black man shooting an innocent white teenager in a vigilante killing. Can you picture that? I think we can all agree that black Zimmerman would have been handcuffed on the spot and thrown into jail never to see the light of day until he had served his plea bargained sentence foisted upon him by some lackluster, hack public defender.

Although George Zimmerman was a wannabe cop, he was more likely to be a police suspect than a police officer. Between 2005 and 2006 he was arrested three times: a domestic violence arrest, "resisting an officer with violence", and charge for speeding. With a violent history, packing a gun, this son of a Florida judge was not charged with the murder of this black teenager for two months,

until after a community petition and outrage. The facts in the case are: Zimmerman had been told by a 911 operator not to pursue Martin whom he viewed as suspicious (Walking While Black.); Zimmerman was carrying an unauthorized weapon; evidence shows that he approached Martin and a scuffle ensued; Martin was on what should have been an uneventful Skittles run to the store in the neighborhood where he was visiting his father; and finally, Martin defended himself against Zimmerman whom he viewed as a threat to his safety, suspecting that he might be some pervert seeking a victim.

With these facts, the defense team has no self-defense argument, which is probably why they skirted the “stand your ground” court. Their go-to position is to paint Martin as some kind of thug from a broken, ebonics-riddled family because they know that the face of crime in America is Trayvon Martin. It was a bad day in court for the defense on Friday when Martin’s mother, Sybrina Fulton, waxed eloquent about her college education, and suit-and-tied Jahvaris Fulton, Trayvon’s brother, presented as a clean-cut, handsome, and intelligent young collegiate.

Now the defense has everyone mired in the muddy waters of forensic minutiae trying to determine if Martin had Zimmerman so battered that he feared for his life and shot him. No matter how you cut it, Trayvon Martin was an unarmed victim battling for his life with a man who had a gun. A man who had no business accosting him and was told not to do so in any capacity. If the black teenager had knocked Zimmerman senseless, Trayvon would still be alive today. But then, we can agree, that he would probably be the one sent to jail...for self-defense. Defending Himself While Black. Interestingly, the issue of racial profiling by George Zimmerman has gotten no attention in this case.

Although Martin was only an off-duty neighborhood watch patroller, the dynamics of the case mirror the way white police are exonerated in the killing of black people.

This sick American behemoth, pronounced post-racial by the Roberts Court, can’t lick its addiction to feeding our jails with young black males while at the same time enriching the coffers of the prison industrial complex. The Trayvon Martin Case is just the shiny tip of a very large iceberg that has caught the attention of the media, political activists, and everyday Americans, but this case is by no means unique. There are no federal statistics kept on police brutality and outright unjustified murder of black men. The National Police Statistics Reporting Project (NPSRP) did a study from April, 2009 to June, 2010. In that time period there were 386 deaths due to police misconduct that were reported. There were 5,986 cases that had been recorded. This does not include cases that did not receive attention.

In Baltimore, the tragic, untimely death of 46-year old African American Anthony Anderson by the hands of police in a routine drug rousting, has been the cause celebre of many political activists responding to the unpunished murders of about a dozen black males in 2012. Although Anderson’s death in East Baltimore was ruled a homicide due to “blunt force trauma” when he was “unnecessarily thrown to the ground [2]” on his head, the three police officers involved were exonerated of using excessive force. But this is not an exception in these kinds of cases. This is the rule.

The message to black people is that black life is cheap, whether hanging from the end of a rope in a sleepy southern town, or snuffed out in a Florida neighborhood after a Skittles run. The anger and frustration of some black people, who cheered renegade black police officer Christopher Dorner’s killing spree against the corrupt LAPD, threatens to explode if Trayvon Martin does not

receive justice. But given the court's track record and an all-white jury selected to judge a multi-racial community, many expect more of the same: to witness American justice treating black men not quite as human chattel as in our slave history, but as collateral damage, inconsequential at that, in an institutionally racist system that profits from the profiling, arrest, and sometimes murder of black people.

The Zimmerman defense team is counting on a racially-charged verdict from at least one of the six white female jurors. Although that might seem like a win for them and a slap on the back for George Zimmerman in that southern Florida court, this verdict will be a slap in the face of black people across the country. Should black people turn the other cheek? After the Voting Rights Act insult and the unjust deaths of too many African American youth whose lives were barely counted, the question is: do black people have another cheek to turn?

EDITORS NOTE:

[1] While George Zimmerman was classified as "white" by the Sanford police, he is a multi-racial Hispanic American. For a brief discussion on Zimmerman's racial background, see [link](#) [3].

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