

Trayvon Martin Was Standing His Ground

Most people are asking whether Florida's 'Stand Your Ground' law should apply to George Zimmerman, the 28-year-old neighborhood watch captain who killed an unarmed Trayvon Martin. That's the wrong question. A better one is, given the circumstances, did the law protect Trayvon when he physically confronted Zimmerman?

In a word, yes.

Looking at the 2005 law from a different perspective – through the eyes of 17-year-old Trayvon instead of Zimmerman – is critical because the debate over what happened on Feb. 26 in Sanford, Fla. is being misframed.

Some facts are undisputed: Trayvon was walking home from a nearby 7-Eleven store, where he had purchased a bag of Skittles and a can of Arizona iced tea, when he was spotted by Zimmerman, who was driving a SUV. Zimmerman dialed 911 and reported seeing a suspicious Black male in the gated townhouse community.

Though he had no proof, Zimmerman claimed that Trayvon appeared to be high on drugs. When Zimmerman confirmed that he was following Trayvon, the 911 operator specifically told him to stop following Trayvon and that police officers were on their way to the scene. Instead of following instructions, Zimmerman continued to follow Trayvon.

What happened next is unclear because we are left only with Zimmerman's version of events. We do know that shortly before he was shot to death, Trayvon had

THE CURRY REPORT

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been talking on his cell phone with his girlfriend. She later told Trayvon's family lawyer that he told her he was being followed by a strange White man. She urged him to run away from him.

According to the Orlando Sentinel, Zimmerman told police he lost sight of Trayvon and got out of his SUV to follow him on foot.

ground with a punch in the nose. Zimmerman said Trayvon climbed on top of him and began slamming his head into the sidewalk.

Zimmerman told police that he began yelling for help, but two voice experts hired by the Sentinel concluded that the voice heard screaming for help on the 911 tapes was not that of the neighborhood watch captain. During the scuffle, Zimmerman pulled his 9 millimeter semi-automatic handgun and fatally shot Trayvon once in the chest.

Police said that when they arrived, Zimmerman was bleeding from the nose, had a swollen lip and had cuts on the back of his head.

Those details were leaked by

Trayvon against the advice of the 911 dispatcher. And with police officers en route, he decided to leave his SUV and hunt for Trayvon.

force if he or she reasonably believes it is necessary to do so to prevent death or great bodily harm to himself or herself or another or to prevent the commission of a

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Even supporters of Florida's Stand Your Ground law don't believe Zimmerman should be allowed to hide behind the controversial legislation.

State Rep. Dennis Baxley, the Ocala Republican who sponsored the bill in the House, told the Tampa Bay Times, "They got the goods on him [Zimmerman]. They need to prosecute whoever shot the kid. He has no protection under my law."

Jeb Bush, who signed the bill into law when he was governor of Florida, agrees.

"This law does not apply to this particular circumstance," he said. "Stand your ground means stand your ground. It doesn't mean chase after somebody who's turned their back."

Florida statute 776.013(3), known as the Stand Your Ground law, says, in part:

(a) person who is not engaged in an unlawful activity and who is attacked in any other place where he or she has a right to be has no duty to retreat and has the right to stand his or her ground and meet force with force, including deadly

forcible felony.

Trayvon was clearly operating within those boundaries when he faced-off against Zimmerman. He was a guest in one of the townhouses and therefore had an undeniable reason to be in the neighborhood. He had no duty to retreat simply because Zimmerman was the aggressor. And Trayvon had every right to believe that the person who had been stalking him was intent on inflicting great bodily harm.

Regardless of how Zimmerman's family tries to spin the facts, it was Trayvon Martin who had the clear right to stand his ground. Whatever he did to Zimmerman was totally justified. And Zimmerman had no right to kill a 17-year-old youth carrying only a bag of candy and iced tea.

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However, even if everything Zimmerman said is true – which is doubtful – he was clearly the aggressor, not the victim. He was the one who pursued Trayvon against the advice of the 911 dispatcher. And with police officers en route, he decided to leave his SUV and hunt for Trayvon

Zimmerman said he was returning to his vehicle when Trayvon allegedly approached him from the rear. The two exchanged words and began fighting. The neighborhood watch captain claimed Trayvon knocked him to the

police to the Orlando newspaper in hopes of bolstering Zimmerman's case. However, even if everything Zimmerman said is true – which is doubtful – he was clearly the aggressor, not the victim. He was the one who pursued

Young Blacks More Optimistic About Race Relations

Over the past 11 years, I have had the opportunity to work closely with the Godfather of Hip-Hop, Russell Simmons. We co-founded the Hip-Hop Summit Action Network (HSAN) in 2001. We have convened more than 75 Hip-Hop Summits across the United States, Canada, and in South Africa, all dealing with such empowerment issues as education, financial literacy, civic engagement, housing and cultural transformation.

Summits that ranged in themes from "Get Your Money Right" to "Get Your House Right" drew thousands of young people. One of the essential findings that we experienced in those youth summits was that young African Americans today who consider themselves to be in the hip-hop generation see the question of race from a more transcendent and optimistic perspective than from the views of their parents or from generations the past.

Consequently, it was not surprising that a recent study by CNN found that African-American children were more optimistic on the issue of race than White children of the same age categories. Although the study that was commissioned by CNN's Anderson Cooper 360 was widely distributed through the news media, it was strange to hear that somehow the "groundbreaking" results pro-

EDUCATION SERVICES

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vided some new revelations about racial progress in America. The timing of the release of this study was ironic given the latest national divide on the issue of race in the wake of the killing of Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Fla.

How a 6-year-old child feels about race or how a teenager or a young adult understands the significance of race in society is often determined at a very early age by what the child experiences or observes from parents and others who interact with them.

According to the study, "A white child and a black child look at the exact same picture of two students on the playground but what they see is often very different and what they say speaks volumes about the racial divide in America." The pictures, designed to be ambiguous, are at the heart of a groundbreaking new study on children and race commissioned by CNN. White and black kids were asked: "What's

happening in this picture?" "Are these two children friends?" and "Would their parents like it if they were friends?"

The study concluded that there was a significant "chasm" and difference between the racial perspectives of the youth involved in the study who were as young as age 6.

CNN reported, "Overall, black first-graders had far more positive interpretations of the images than white first-graders. In fact, only 38 percent of black children had a

age of 13, their views about race become much more pessimistic, similar to the views of White children their age. An explanation was offered by the study's author, Melanie Killen of the University of Maryland: "Experiences of rejection and the harsh realities of race relations most likely explain the trend."

The burden of eliminating racism and the ideology of White supremacy from the institutions of this society and from the mindset of people is not consigned to one racial group versus another racial group. In a multiracial society, there has to be a full commitment and serious responsibility for all people to work together to bridge the nation's complex racial divide.

There is no question that we have made racial progress during the past 100 years in the United States. There is also no question that we have not overcome yet. Our youth are intelligent and conscious of the ways that race still is a discriminating factor that can determine ones quality of life. All youth, not African American youth alone, have to rise to the historical and contemporary chal-

lenges that must be faced and transformed. That is why, from my vantage point, it is healthy for so many young people to become energized in response to the tragedy of Trayvon Martin. We all must remain vigilant and active. There is much more progress to be accomplished.

The 2012 national elections, the reform of the educational system, the upcoming Supreme Court rulings on health care, the attempts in 30 or more states to suppress the Black vote, and other issues that will impact how our young people and others can have a better life are all matters of urgent concern. Let's avoid cynicism and fear of change. Let's make social change occur as the result of our collective determination and struggle for freedom, justice, equality and empowerment. Our race and our blackness are not a curse. We are a blessed people with a great future ahead, but we must not relent or retreat in the face of the resurgence of racial discrimination. Let's continue to push forward and make our nation and world a better place for all.

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negative interpretation of the pictures, whereas almost double – a full 70 percent of white kids – felt something negative was happening."

The study also revealed that by the time Black children reach the