**The 2013 George Zimmerman Case**

**Name**

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**Abstract**

George Zimmerman's case highlights the impact that media framing can have on the public's perception of a case or crime. While Zimmerman acted in self-defense, media coverage that made race a key issue in the case forced the public and even the prosecution to view the case differently. Most people believed the case would have an impact on race relations and hoped for a guilty verdict. The evidence presented, however, showed that race was not a critical issue in the case and that the suspect had acted in self-defense. The case, however, highlighted the challenges of evaluating acts of self-defense correctly, given the difficulty the protection faced when trying to prove their case.

**Introduction**

The 2013 case of the fatal shooting of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman generally highlights the impact that the media can have on the public's perception of a case. While the suspect, George Zimmerman, acted in self-defense, the media framed his actions as having been motivated by racial bias (Brodin, 2015). This played a key role in making the case nationally popular, in addition to providing an incentive to prosecutors to charge Zimmerman with limited evidence. The repeated coverage of the case also made it a mainstream topic that was discussed by everyone in the country, including celebrities and national leaders. The failure by the media to objectively cover the case was generally the main reason why the case was inaccurately framed as involving racial bias.

**Description of the Crime**

The crime involved the fatal shooting of the victim in what was largely considered to be a case of racial profiling. The suspect was part of a neighborhood watch that was meant to improve security in the local areas by identifying possible cases of burglary and other security incidents early. While on patrol, the suspect met with the victim, after which an altercation ensued (Torres et al., 2017). The suspect claims he was violently attacked and slammed to the ground by the victim. Fearing for his life, he shot the victim in self-defense, seriously injuring him, which eventually led to his death. The suspect reported the incident to the local police department, which did not take him into custody based on his claim that he fired in self-defense. After an investigation, however, the suspect was charged with second-degree murder based on the facts of the case. Due to the fact that the crime was largely believed to have been influenced by race, the case gained a great deal of public attention and led to a number of projects in different parts of the country. A significant section of the public believed race was the main reason for the shooting. Numerous celebrities and national leaders also appeared to support this view.

**Analysis of Crime and Criminal Behavior**

The case mainly highlighted the extent to which self-defense can be exercised legally. The suspect strongly believed they acted in self-defense, meaning that had they not fired at the victim, they would have most likely lost their life. The case showed that what amounts to self-defense is not always clear (Hurtado, 2020). Other cases were cited, for example, that showed that firing a warning shot does not amount to self-defense and one can be prosecuted for manslaughter.

Generally, the suspect did not exhibit what can be considered to be criminal behavior based on the facts of the case. While they may have used more force than they should have, the circumstances of the case show that the suspect did their best to handle the situation and, unfortunately, had to resort to deadly force. Based on the evidence presented, the victim played a role in starting and escalating the altercation that led to the shooting. The ruling made by the jury generally identifies evidence that indicates the suspect acted in self-defense and was not motivated by racial bias in their actions (Eliasson, 2023). Public pressure played a key role in influencing the actions of the prosecution regarding the case. Prosecutors were determined to have responded more swiftly to the case due to growing public pressure about the case. While the suspect would not have been charged if there was no compelling evidence that they broke the law, the prosecution selected to make a case based on evidence that was later determined to not be sufficient.

**Media Involvement in the Coverage**

The media’s involvement in the case played a key role in influencing public opinion on the case and the protests that took place for most of the trial. The racial framing of the case was especially important in influencing public opinion on the case. The media repeatedly emphasized that the fact that the suspect was Hispanic and the victim was black was a critical reason why the altercation occurred in the first place (Lerouge, 2017). The media, as a result, made it appear that the victim was accosted and shot mainly due to their race, which was later determined to be false based on the facts of the case. This came at a time when violence against minorities was a sensitive issue in the country, making the case a prominent example.

The repeated legal analysis of the case also played a key role in influencing public opinion on whether or not the suspect was guilty. Most media outlets brought in legal experts to analyze the case, and in most cases, they tried to frame the suspect as being guilty. Local laws that permitted self-defense were analyzed in detail during these sessions. As a result, most people in the country had little choice but to get to know about the case and pick sides based on their interpretation of what took place (Onwuachi et al., 2018). The media also made a deliberate effort to sensationalize the case. Most media outlets provided pictures of both the suspect and the victim and highlighted the fact that the suspect had not been charged because of a legal technicality. The public was, as a result, forced to view the case emotionally and did not stop to analyze the evidence as they would have otherwise done. This also contributed to the protests that took place and the general assumption that the suspect was guilty.

The repeated coverage of the case was also a key reason why it became a national issue that almost everyone in the country was aware of and talked about. Most media outlets closely followed the case and reported on all major developments. The public was, as a result, convinced that the case was important and could aid in defining race relations in the country. If the media had paid less attention to the case, public opinion on whether the suspect was guilty would not have been as intense and widespread as it was (Brodin, 2022). Social media also played a key role in sharing information about the case and mobilizing support for the protests that took place. Social media was at the time gaining traction in the country and could be used to share misleading information that had not been fact-checked by almost everyone in the country. People who did not get to know about the case in the mainstream media as a result got to know about it on social media.

The involvement of celebrities and national leaders also played a key role in giving the case national prominence. Civil rights activities followed the case closely and used it to highlight most of the racial problems that were being experienced in different parts of the country. Celebrities also took the time to weigh in on the case and call for the arrest and protection of the suspect. This input by celebrities served to make the case more popular and contributed to the protests that took place during the trial.

**Perspectives on Media Influence**

The media generally played a key role in shaping public opinion on the case. The fact that the case was largely framed as being the result of racial bias played a key role in making it a national issue that was discussed by everyone in the country. The legal analysis of the case and the engagement of celebrities also played a role in making the case nationally popular. Without the involvement of the media, it is highly likely that the case would have been prosecuted differently based on the evidence that was in place.

**Conclusion**

While initially, public opinion generally assumed that Zimmerman was guilty, the analysis of evidence related to the case eventually showed that he acted in self-defense and was not acting on racial bias, as was widely believed. The media played a key role in shaping public opinion about the case. The media selected to frame the case as involving racial bias, which played a key role in making it nationally prominent. The repeated legal analysis of the case also contributed to the widespread public view that Zimmerman was guilty. Celebrities also increased the attention the case received. The ruling, however, indicated that racial bias was not a key factor in the case, and Zimmerman had acted in self-defense. In general, the case highlights the influence that the media can have in influencing public opinion regarding matters of law.

**References**

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