Dayla Littlejohn

Mrs. Camp

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Big Paper #2

An older brother goes out at night to fetch his younger step-brother some Skittles and an Arizona tea from the local 7/11. He leaves on foot with a hoodie on, as it is a February night. A trip to the store should have taken no more than 15 minutes and instead hours had gone by with no sign of his return. The younger brother goes to sleep, hoping his brother will return during the night. Morning comes and his father files a missing persons report. The day after that, police arrive and ask them to identify some photos of their son, whom would be the seventeen-year-old fatally shot that previous night while returning home from the 7/11 (Linder). Trayvon Martin had no intent of harm; therefore, his death was ridiculed by the verdict of the Zimmerman trial.

On February 26, 2012 at 7:09 p.m., Sanford Police received a call from George Zimmerman, an alarmed civilian reporting his suspicions of a black teenager roaming around near his neighborhood. This night, Zimmerman was on neighborhood watch, due to recent crimes in neighborhood. Zimmerman, while on the phone with police, starts to approach Martin, even though they warn him not to do so. Zimmerman implied to police that Martin may have a weapon as he told police, “Yup, he's coming to check me out, he's got something in his hands, I don't know what his deal is” (Linder). The 9/11 call fails as the two get in a scuffle, and Trayvon is fatally shot with a stray bullet in the chest by Zimmerman; it’s not certain who was the aggressor in the situation because each side points the finger at the opposing side as the aggressor. It isn’t until February 28 that Trayvon is identified by his father, following the missing person’s report filed by his father the day before. The trial for Trayvon’s killing began on June 24, 2013 with a six-person, all-female jury, which consisted of 5 White and 1 Latina. The jurors deliberated for over 16 hours over the course of two days and came to the verdict of Zimmerman being not guilty (Botelho and Yan).

In every trial, there are always two sides. In this case, some people believe that Zimmerman’s reaction is justified and he acted in self defense, while others believe Zimmerman acted rashly and racially profiled Trayvon. A *USA TODAY* poll conducted before Zimmerman’s arrest and trial revealed that 73% of African Americans believe if Martin had been white, Zimmerman would have been arrested immediately (Jeffries). It is also true that there had been a history of recent crimes in that neighborhood, and that’s the reason why Zimmerman was on watch in the first place. Professor Douglas Linder from University of Missouri Kansas City explains it this way: “Zimmerman's suspicions arose primarily because Martin was not a resident of the Twin Lakes development, was a teenager wearing a hoodie when teenagers had been implicated in recent crimes at Twin Lakes” (Linder). However, a neighborhood watch is imposed with the intent of watching, observing, and reporting suspicious activity to the police and not acting upon the situation by oneself. Using the neighborhood watch as an excuse is therefore not sufficient to justify shooting Trayvon that night.

Trayvon Martin was not a threat to anyone, including George Zimmerman. Trayvon, a seventeen-year-old, which is the age most people start committing crimes, had not had any previous run ins with the police. In fact, Zimmerman, the shooter, is the one with a criminal history, not Trayvon, the victim. In the years leading up to Trayvon’s killing, Zimmerman had been charged with a felony for resisting the arrest of an undercover cop in 2005, which was later downgraded to a misdemeanor and a court order of anger management classes. A couple months later, his ex girlfriend had also requested an “order of protection” against Zimmerman (Graves). Zimmerman suspected Martin may have had a weapon in his hand, which was later revealed to be a bag of Skittles and a bottle of iced tea. This shows Zimmerman’s violent, rash, and without-thought tendencies, which are characteristics he’s exhibited in the past when he was arrested for interfering with the arrest of his friend and resisting his arrest.

George Zimmerman reacted irrationally and impulsively. Zimmerman was suspicious of Martin, but not threatened enough to use a deadly force against him. The defense team questioned why Trayvon had a hood on at night, but it was February night and the temps were more than likely cooler. Zimmerman made it seem in the phone call, as if Martin may have had a weapon in his pocket, when he tells police, “He's got his hand in his waistband” (Linder). Zimmerman was thinking pessimistic in this moment, because Martin could’ve just had his hands in his waistband or anything but a weapon. Although, it did turn out to be something in his pockets, those items found consists of a cigarette lighter, earphones, a bottle of Arizona watermelon fruit juice, some cash, and a bag of Skittles (Linder). All of these items are everyday things people carry around with them. None of which are usually used to harm anyone. Because of his irrational thinking, he ended the life of someone who had no intent to harm him but didn’t serve no time.

George Zimmerman received no punishment. Jurors came to the verdict of “not guilty” for Zimmerman on July 13, 2013, as they accepted his claim of self defense as justification. A main reason for this is the Stand Your Ground law implemented by Florida in 2005, which allows an individual to use deadly force if they believe such is necessary to protect themselves from serious harm (Linder). Similar laws to this law, providing the individual with civil and sometimes criminal immunity was only implemented in about 24 other states at the time of Zimmerman’s trial (Currier). Zimmerman was acquitted of all charges so he received no jail time, probation, community service, or any type of discipline for murdering Trayvon Martin. He got off scot free and walks just as freely as someone who has never committed a crime in their life.

Trayvon Martin’s case is another infamous case of racial profiling of black males that has left a mark in history, similar to the cases of Emmett Till and Rodney King. All three cases were unjust by the acquittal of the suspects. The verdict of Zimmerman’s trial caused chaos and commotion throughout America and many voiced their concern and frustration of the mistreatment of black lives. This case brought attention once again to racism and racial profiling, which has been plaguing America for decades. With this shooting occurring in the South, where racial discrimination is statistically worst and in Florida, where the “Stand Your Ground” law is upheld, it wasn’t much of a surprise that George Zimmerman was acquitted. However, Martin’s death and the verdict of the trial initiated the social movement throughout America known as the Black Lives Matter Movement, which has triumphed the past decade.

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