

Zimmerman Trial Reflects White Prejudice in Legal System

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GREEN BAY – The American Legal System boasts that it gives the accused the right to a trial before his or her peers. Unfortunately for justice, it sometimes does not guarantee the same right for the victim.

Such was graphically the case in the trial of George Zimmerman last week in Florida for the murder of Trayvon Martin.

In case you were vacationing on Mars for the last few years, George Zimmerman was a neighborhood watch volunteer and want-a-be cop in the pretty much all white community of Sanford, Florida who saw Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old black youth from out of town, walking down his block. Zimmerman decided to follow him, armed with a gun, and ended up shooting the unarmed Martin dead.

A simple story and one you should think about if you go around packing a gun.

But the story gets complicated from there. The Sanford Police decide to take their local guy's story at face value and let him go, no fault charged. The Martin family and the national media get involved, demanding at least a decent investigation and trial, in the name of justice for the dead youth. The political right and left charge to their respective sides and the American Legal System lumbers into action.

Now, sixteen months later, the verdict is in and the pretty much all white jury of Sanford residents decide to take their local guy's story at face value and let him go. Are we surprised?

If Trayvon Martin did the shooting and was the defendant, he could have at least asked for a change of venue by saying he could not get a fair trial in the white community. The police and the jury would apply their community standards in judging the credibility of his story and find him guilty before he even opened his mouth. Unfortunately, he was the victim and could not speak.

In America, black youth, especially young black men face the same problem every day. Often guilty of no more than "walking while black" they are profiled by police as "suspicious", picked up, and processed into a legal system that is stacked against them. Anyone who says there is no racial prejudice involved is not in touch with reality.

Most probably, there will be no justice for Trayvon Martin. He was found guilty by a jury of Zimmerman's peers. But maybe, just maybe, we can use this sad incident to start a real discussion about race in America and our legal system. Maybe, some time in this century, all of us can come to see a black kid as just another kid.

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