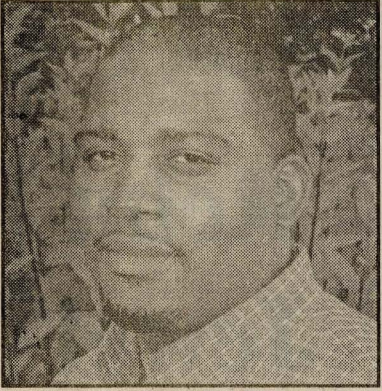


Reflections On Trayvon Martin And George Zimmerman

An Open Letter Of Apologies And Thank You To Trayvon Martin



By De'Sean Quinn

After the weekend I took much time to reflect on the "not guilty" verdict in the George Zimmermann murder trial that concluded Saturday. Like many, I was aware and tracking the daily commentary of this trial. I was disappointed in the outcome, however I respect the decision reached by the Court. The burden of proof resides with the prosecution and they failed. I am extremely disappointed in the

prosecution's case and the responsibility for the loss falls squarely on their shoulders however our society and our lack of compassion and understanding also contributed greatly to the ultimate decision.

I want to apologize as an American to Trayvon for your civil and human rights being violated. A young life was taken too soon and the verdict does not resolve the unfortunate life being lost.

I want to apologize as a citizen that I have not tried harder to be placed on juries. Knowing the value of diverse perspectives and professional experiences in our jury pools is our collective responsibility.

I apologize as someone whose experience includes being profiled by police and regular everyday people and not always taking action to challenge and educate those that may have felt

comfortable doing so. Like filing formal complaints with police departments and offering to have dialogue with those who think it's appropriate to clutch their purses when I get on an elevator. Or walking out a store and not patronizing establishments that think it's appropriate to follow me up and down the aisles for fear I may steal something.

Thank you to Trayvon Martin for reminding the community that we must organize, march, lobby, write, build coalitions, vote, run for office, mentor, teach, pray, donate, affectively work together and serve in our communities. Not because we are outraged but because we are committed to never having this situation ever occur again.

I apologize that as a tax payer that I have not lobbied the district, municipal and superior

courts in my community to have a high level of training in cultural competency to reduce instances where generalizations, ignorance and discrimination may occur in decisions reached by courts. As a tax payer I have observed significant funding reductions in after school programs, teen recreational programs funding by state, local and federal governments.

As a tax payer I apologize for not successfully lobbying for increased funding of education and addressing the opportunity gaps that exist in our education system.

I want to thank you Trayvon Martin for reminding us all that even though the Supreme Court Justice John Roberts recently said "Our country has changed" in the opinion recently striking down parts of the voting rights act of 1965. Your rights were violated on the day you were

murdered and we must remain diligent in protecting civil and human rights of all in this country.

I want to thank Trayvon for reminding me to never forget the lessons that my father taught me about society's perceptions of young African American men. Telling me that I need to continue to challenge those negative perceptions while being diligent and avoid situations where my credibility can be questioned. I want to thank Trayvon Martin for reminding me to hold my son a little closer and pass on those lessons from my father. One day I will tell him that even though no one is perfect you do not have the luxury of making youthful mistakes. That the stakes are high on decisions you make. I can't help but look into my sons eyes that are filled with joy and happiness believing as my

parents did that his future will be better.

I apologize to Trayvon Martin as a voter and someone that has worked on many campaigns that we have not elected a congress that is willing to pass gun control laws to help reduce gun violence in this country.

Finally I want to thank you for sharing your story, there is a lesson in your experience for everyone no matter what community you are in that life is sacred. Your story no matter how short taught us that your young life is something we as a society should have cherished and protected.

De'Sean Quinn is a member of the Tukwila City Council, a father and a community member.

Reflecting On The George Zimmerman Verdict



By Daniella Gibbs Leger

I have started and stopped this column multiple times. There are things I feel and want to say about the George Zimmerman trial that aren't fit for this publication. I have more thoughts than can probably fit into 3 different essays. I struggle with what is the most important/crucial view I want to share. So perhaps I'll start with a personal story.

Last Friday, I was pulled

over by the police. I was maybe going a little too fast, but I didn't see any radar guns, so perhaps it was a DUI checkpoint. They told me to turn off my car and asked for my driver's license. The officers asked a few questions, we shared a laugh or two, and they let me go on my merry way. Oh, did I mention that this occurred in the Caribbean? I probably should, because if it happened here there would be no joking; everything would have been all business. And the biggest difference would have been that in the U.S., I would have been scared as hell until they let me go.

That's what it means to be Black in America. Even when I know I am doing nothing wrong, I feel the weight of other people's suspicions on my shoulders. I get anxious when

cops pull up behind me even if I'm breaking no laws. I zip up all bags when I walk into stores lest anyone accuse me of attempting to steal something. On a non-crime note, I still feel that I must list my high school GPA and SAT scores when I talk about what college I went to, since some like to assume that I must have taken the spot of some other more qualified person. In the hours of Twitter, email, Facebook and in-person conversations I've had since this verdict was delivered, the main underlying theme is one of bone-shaking tiredness. Trayvon Martin did nothing wrong, yet he is dead. George Zimmerman stalked him, got out of his car when police told him not to, never identified himself as a neighborhood watchman, got

into a scuffle with a presumably scared kid who would have had every right to defend himself against this stranger, shot and killed him and today he walks free. Oh, and he gets his gun back too. Yay Florida!

So what do we tell our young boys (and girls) today? Don't wear hoodies? Don't buy Skittles and iced tea? Don't walk in any neighborhood after 8pm? Don't be aware of your surroundings at all times because if you confront someone, you might get shot? And if you run away, you still might get shot?

The racist trolls were out in full effect Saturday night. I might have to put defense attorney Mark O'Mara in that category too...ok, not (necessarily) the racist part, but he certainly trolled us all when

he said that if Zimmerman had been Black, he would have never been arrested. Let that statement sink in for a while. My reaction (one not suitable for print) was and is one of great astonishment. Because O'Mara seems to be many things - a complete idiot isn't one of them. If Zimmerman had been Black, for one, he would have been arrested right away, not after 40 days of protests. Two, if we assume Martin is still Black, no one would have known or cared about this case outside of Sanford, Florida. Three, if Trayvon is White in this scenario? Please, Zimmerman would have been under the jail already. And to claim otherwise is to have a complete ignorance of the current justice system in this country.

So what now? In the immediate aftermath, there is a lot of anger, but there is also the beginning of a movement. And that's a topic for another column. In the meantime, parents hug your kids tighter tonight. Have those difficult conversations with them. It may pain you to have to tell them about the realities of being Black in America, but your words could maybe save their lives. Of course as I type that last sentence, I still don't know what Trayvon could have done differently besides not be a Black kid in a hoodie. And that fact right there breaks my heart.

Daniella Gibbs Leger is the Senior Vice President for American Values and New Communities with the Center for American Progress.

THE TRAYVON MARTIN VERDICT AND WHY WE MUST MAKE VOTING OUR #1 PRIORITY



By Sherry Collier, Esq.

The Trayvon Martin case was the opportunity where most Blacks believed that surely the collective struggle of Black America would be rewarded somehow. This case presented itself as the perfect opportunity for a bold "statement" to be made to the world about how it was possible for this country to look racism squarely in the eyes and give it a Mike Tyson style

knock-out punch. Certainly, George Zimmerman would not walk out of the courtroom a free man. When the verdict was announced on Saturday, July 13, 2013, the knock-out punch that many expected ended up being a sucker punch to the gut of the Black community.

The reaction by most was pure amazement and unbridled frustration. Our hopes and desires for a different kind of America were taken away with just two words: not guilty. The collective sadness on Saturday when the verdict was announced was the type of despair that cuts deep. No riots, no Molotov cocktail bombs being thrown into store windows like when the Rodney King verdict was announced. Some say that we were too sad and disappointed to react in the same manner as the Rodney King riots. Perhaps

cooler heads prevailed? Whatever the case, the nation that we thought would be ushered in with a conviction of George Zimmerman never happened.

The decision in the Trayvon Martin case was not a just decision. Make no mistake about it. However, the current "stand your ground" law that is available as a defense in Florida allowed George Zimmerman the inch of daylight that he needed to escape punishment within the legal system. The previous version of the law included a "duty to retreat", where an individual basically had to use reasonable efforts that did not jeopardize their safety in order to avoid the danger they perceived. Under the old version of the law, the issue for the jury probably would have been whether or not Zimmerman made a reasonable

effort to avoid the danger he perceived and whether getting out the car to approach Trayvon Martin was consistent with avoiding danger?

The previous version of Florida's "stand your ground" law was scrapped in favor of the current version that does not have a "duty to retreat" provision. Why? Well, that's what the Florida voters wanted. In a state like Florida where 48% of the prison inmates are black, but blacks make up less than 17% of the total population, the power of the vote provided the opportunity for George Zimmerman to walk out of court a free man. Florida is a Republican state and perhaps there will never be enough votes to overcome a poorly written law such as the "stand your ground law", but in a city like Seattle, the power of the vote should

never be underestimated because if everyone voted we would certainly see some of the outcomes that we need in our communities.

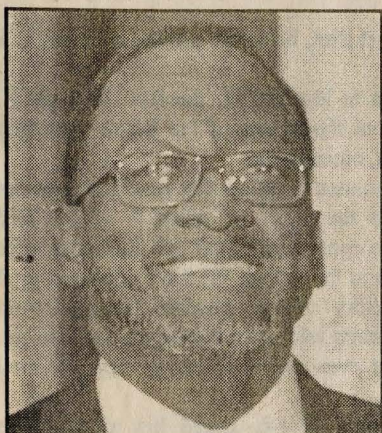
The challenge is that overwhelmingly, black folks in Seattle are simply not voting in the smaller local elections where the impact of our vote would be felt immediately. Yes, we vote in the national election in large numbers. Yes, we showed President Obama a great deal of support, but we cannot forget about our local elections. Local elections that would address things such as low graduation rates, youth violence, police misconduct, disparity in sentencing and the negative impact of these issues require our immediate attention. We cannot sit by idly while local city-wide elections are held and not participate in the political

process. There is a line from a movie where the aspiring politician yells out into a group of naïve voters that "if you don't vote, you don't matter".

I am hopeful that the verdict in the Trayvon Martin case will remind our community that it was the law that allowed George Zimmerman to walk out of court a free man and that we all need to be vigilant and informed when filling out our ballots for our local elections and when electing our local lawmakers. Do your research on the candidates and determine whether the issues they plan to address represent your interests. Here in Seattle, we have a primary election coming up and the power to make change is in your vote.

Sherry Collier is a Seattle-based attorney.

TEACHABLE MOMENTS - Reflections On Zimmerman Verdict



By Robert S. White, II

By now, the story sounds almost surreal.

Ignoring the advice of law enforcement personnel, a former neighborhood watch leader armed with a loaded gun stalks a 17-year-old black male he feels to be "suspicious." The young

Black teenager is shot and killed by the armed man. Save for a bag of candy and a can of iced tea purchased at the store, the teenager is unarmed. Nearly a year and a half later, the shooter is exonerated and the headlines read "George Zimmerman is found not guilty in the shooting death of Trayvon Martin."

Beyond the outrage and the visceral disgust so many are feeling, I have been somewhat compelled to ask people what lessons they feel this ordeal has taught them and what points have stood out in their minds. As a firm believer in "teachable moments," I cannot help but be reflective while encouraging others to do the same.

Here are a few points that

have been "top of mind" for me:

- This verdict reinforced for me that a courtroom is a "court of law" not a "court of justice." I once heard it this way: as an artist uses the tools of his trade to achieve the ideal of beauty in a painting or sculpture, officers of the court use the tool of the law to try to achieve the ideal of justice.

- It amazes me how George Zimmerman was "in the wrong" until he was "in the right." He stereotyped, disobeyed a law enforcement official, and stalked an unarmed young man while carrying a loaded weapon. But after all of these bad decisions, he was somehow judged to be "in the right" when he shot and killed Trayvon.

- The family of Trayvon Martin will now annually endure a recurring calendar of mournful events including February 5 - Trayvon's birthday, February 26 - the date of this tragic shooting, and July 13 - the date that George Zimmerman was exonerated by a Florida court in the death of their son.

- One friend of mine comments that most Americans have possibly been watching TV court dramas for too long. Legal cases are not as clear cut as writers make them out to be.

- If Zimmerman's profiling of Trayvon as "suspicious" was wrong, shouldn't pre-judging the jurors as "racist" be equally offensive?

- Someone willing to vouch

for your character is important (my barber swears by this one).

- African-American men being racially profiled is not some fabricated issue; it is unfortunately very real.

- "Not guilty" seems to be the wrong phrase to share many times. "Guilt was not proven beyond a reasonable doubt" fits the bill a lot better. "Not guilty" does not mean "innocent."

- There are many families in the cities of America grieving over a loved one lost to gun violence. The family of Trayvon is unfortunately a recent addition to an obscenely long list of the bereaved.

Maybe this aforementioned point is one we should all consider. Too many of our youth

have been murdered in the neighborhoods of our cities with no gathering to mark their demise or vigil to help bring an end to the senseless killings. Maybe after this tragedy, our outrage will no longer be so difficult to prick. Maybe this case will make us all pay more attention to the people we pass by every day.

Whatever "teachable moments" any of us may derive from this ordeal, I am hopeful that none of these will be a lesson in giving up on our ability to impact corporate and systemic change through our actions and attitudes.

Robert S. White, II is the Chief of Staff for the mayor of Memphis, TN.