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<http://www.counterpunch.org/2013/07/17/what-it-feels-like-to-be-black-in-america/>

## What It Feels Like to be Black in America

**"No Rights That Any White Man is Bound to Respect"**

by KEVIN ALEXANDER GRAY

July 17, 2013

*Seminole County, Florida ~ named for the Seminole people who once lived throughout the area. The term Seminole comes from the Creek word 'semino le', which means 'runaway' and the Spanish word cimarrón which means "runaway slave." While the logo of the Florida State University Seminoles is that of a white man, Thomas Wright a longtime music professor at the school with a free lifetime pass to all athletic events, Seminole is the collective name given to the amalgamation/intermixing of various groups of native Americans and runaway- ex-enslaved Africans who settled in Florida in the early 18th century and fought three wars against the United States. The 1st Seminole War was from 1814 to 1819, the 2nd from 1835 to 1842, and the 3rd from 1855 to 1858. In 1817, future U.S. President Andrew Jackson, called the "Extermination President" for his savagery in profiling and annihilating the Native population, invaded then-Spanish Florida and defeated the Seminoles in the 1<sup>st</sup> war. And after defeating U.S. forces in early battles of the 2<sup>nd</sup> War, Seminole leader Chief Osceola was tricked, then captured on Oct. 20, 1837, when U.S. troops said they wanted a truce to talk peace. In 1946, Jackie Robinson, in Sanford at a Brooklyn Dodgers' baseball training camp, couldn't stay in a white-owned hotel with teammates and was forced to flee the town in the middle of the night to avoid being lynched by local whites opposed to desegregation of the team. Fast forward to Christmas 1952, in an atmosphere of race terror and state indifference, NAACP leader Harry T. Moore and his wife Harriette were killed when the Ku Klux Klan blew up their' home on*

*Christmas night. The closest hospital was 35 miles away in Sanford. There was a delay in getting the couple to the hospital and getting a black doctor to attend to them. They both died in Sanford. No one spent a day in jail for his or her murders. Today the racial makeup of the county is 82.41% White, 9.52% Black, 11.15% Hispanic, or Latino, 0.30% Native American 2.50% Asian, 0.04% Pacific Islander, 3.06% from other races, and 2.18% from two or more races. Out of a population of 54,000, about 57 percent of Sanford City residents are white and 31 percent are black.*

A friend asked me if I'd been keeping up with the George Zimmerman trial. My immediate answer was, "Not really. Watching it was really angering me." But then I admitted I was lying. I had hedged to temper my anger. I also didn't want to try to explain to the white person on the other end of the phone how it feels being black in the USA these days.

Like many others, I believe that Zimmerman is a liar, a racist and a murderer (with the understanding that 'murder' is a *legal* term).

I believe that Zimmerman profiled Martin.

And I believe that Martin had every right, even a greater right, to fight for his life with all the strength he could muster. He lost the fight for his life because his killer had a gun, and Martin had only a can of Arizona iced tea and a bag of Skittles.

Yet if you didn't know any better you'd think Trayvon Benjamin Martin was on trial, and George Zimmerman the victim.

After the five white, one Latina all female jury female found Zimmerman not guilty it occurred to me that Martin has been subjected to worse treatment over the airwaves than Adam Lanza, the perpetrator of the Newtown killings.

I was disappointed with the verdict. I think my disappointment is related to the reason why blacks are so overwhelmingly in support of Barack Obama. Because, with all the unfairness that comes with living in an environment with pervasive racism and white skin entitlement, blacks still consciously and subconsciously desire white acceptance. To many blacks Obama represents that acceptance. So, though my experience told me it was a done deal from the very start of the trial, I had hoped that a white judge, white prosecutors and for the most, a white jury would be just.

I make no apology for my bias against racist and racism. Oftentimes when I'm speaking to a crowd I'll introduce myself as a father and a grandfather followed by "they can take your car, house, job, a spouse can kick you to the curb, but being a parent and grandparent is something they can't take from you." I was a young black boy at one time and I've raised black boys. I know what they face. I know that white supremacy does take us out at will.

When I was coming up, I would hear a young white man proclaim that "he's free, white and 21," and that meant the world was his. For black males the benchmark age is "*35 and still alive.*"

So in all honesty, I despise Zimmerman and every racist thing he and his supporters stand for. That's the feeling I get by just seeing his image online or in the courtroom or even hearing his voice. I've seen too many victims of raw, racist power wielded by fools. No court proceeding or verdict is going to change that *feeling* in me or that *reality* for black males.

My friend, knowing me as well as she does, never took my "not really" seriously and pressed on until I told her that I had watched most of prosecution's case, including Don West and Mark O'Mara's cross-examination of prosecution witnesses. I watched most if not all of Martin's mother and father, Sabrina Fulton and Tracy Martin, and his brother Jahvaris Fulton's testimonies. I saw a good deal of the medical examiner, Dr. Shiping Bao, who conducted Martin's autopsy. I watched Alexis Carter, the instructor who taught Zimmerman's criminal litigation class and instructed him on Florida's self-defense laws. And I watched prosecutors Richard Mantei, Bernie de la Rionda and John Guy. I saw very little of the defense's case other than a couple of minutes of Zimmerman's mother Gladys's testimony and O'Mara's closing. I didn't waste time or emotional capital watching much of the defense. I saw some. But basically, I saw what I expected to see in their cross-examinations. To me, any witness they put up only served to bolster Zimmerman's lies.

Even so, I went on to tell my friend how excruciating it was to hear the defense argue that Zimmerman, against the instructions of the police, initiated a pursuit of a stranger who was not committing a crime, and that Zimmerman had a greater right of self-defense than his victim.

That Martin's fists and the concrete sidewalk were his "deadly weapons."

That Martin was basically a "homicidal maniac."

But for all Trayvon Martin knew Zimmerman could have been a Jeffrey Dahmer-type.

Yet many Zimmerman supporters will only ever see black boys and men as "dope smoking," "gang-banging" "thugs" and "low-lives" with no right to exist.

That's what Zimmerman's father, brother and backers were saying before the start of the trial. They hired attorneys to advance their racism and assert their demand for white privilege. They even found Chana Lloyd, a young, black, attractive female third-year law student to sit behind them in court. Lloyd claimed in an interview that she asked O'Mara, "Is George a racist?" to which he responded, "I wouldn't work for him if he was." I won't be surprised to see Lloyd land a spot on Fox News, where Zimmerman has said he also hopes to be.

Obviously, knowing history is not a requirement for a law degree. If it were Lloyd would have had to recognize O'Mara's Klan defense strategy. That Zimmerman was protecting white womanhood. That's why in his closing argument he showed the jury of six women, five of whom were white, a picture of Zimmerman's white woman neighbor, defense witness Olivia Bertalan. The defense invoked the same justification for the killing of Martin that the Ku Klux Klan used to lynch black men in the past.

O'Mara held up a picture of a "thugged-out version" of Martin, shirtless and wearing his gold "gangsta grill" in his teeth. The implicit message: "George Zimmerman was protecting, not just himself, but white womanhood from this vicious, black thug." When he held up a big chunk of concrete all I could think about was the old racist joke where the white sheriff and his deputies pull the body of a black man killed by the Klan out of the lake wrapped in chains and his response is: "See boys! Just like a nigger. Stole more chains than he could carry."

In the months leading up to the trial, Robert Zimmerman Sr., the father of the accused, said, "Racism is flourishing at the insistence of some in the *African-American* community." He called the Congressional Black Caucus "a pathetic, self-serving group of racists... advancing their purely racist agenda." And that "all members of Congress should be ashamed of the Congressional Black Caucus, as should be their constituents," adding, "They are truly a disgrace to all Americans." He called NAACP President Benjamin Jealous "a racist" and said his organization "simply promotes racism and hatred for their own, primarily financial, interests" and "without prejudice and racial divide, the NAACP would simply cease to exist."

Like father, like son, Robert Zimmerman Jr., the defendant's brother, sent out a series of racist Tweets and photos before the trial. He compared Trayvon Martin with De'Marquise Elkins, a 17-year-old detained in the murder of a Georgia infant. Both pictures feature the young men "flipping the bird" at the camera, with the caption: "A picture speaks a thousand words...Any questions?" He also posted several Tweets saying that "blacks" are worthy of others' fear, including: "Lib media shld ask if what these2 black teens did 2 a woman&baby is the reason ppl think blacks mightB risky."

Frank Taaffe, outspoken defender of Zimmerman, has been all over the media spewing just about any racist thing he wants to spew. Such as: "The stage was already set. It was a perfect storm." In one CNN interview he let loose, "Neighbor-*hood* (emphasizing 'hood'), that's a great word. "We had eight burglaries in our neighborhood, all perpetrated by young black males in the 15 months prior to Trayvon being shot... You know, there's an old saying that if you plant corn, you get corn." So in Taaffe's white supremacist world black people should expect to take a bullet for another black person's actions even if there's no connection between them.

Then there's Fox News where it seems that the only thing blacks can do to make them happy (unless you're against Obama, a hawk, fundamentalist Christian xenophobe, Republican, quasi-libertarian or into self-hate for the money) is to somehow move to another planet or solar system. One of their news hosts, Gregg Jarrett, suggested on air that Zimmerman might have been justified in killing Martin because the teen "may have been violent" from smoking marijuana. I thought, the 18 states and the District of Columbia where medical marijuana is legal must not have gotten the memo. Ironically, for the most, it's whites leading marijuana legalization efforts and smoking more pot than blacks. Yet whites, and white youth in particular, are not criminalized like blacks kids in the ongoing war on drugs.

When Judge Debra Nelson allowed Martin's drug test in was a "tell" on the way the trial was going to unfold. How could the prosecutors wholeheartedly argue against the ridiculous claim that pot makes a person violent when the majority of the people that they prosecute and imprison are for marijuana possession charges? Pot arrests and adjudications are the feeding trough of the

criminal justice system. It's the essence of what Michelle Alexander and others call "the new Jim Crow."

The police, prosecutors, judges and defense lawyers are all complicit in a system that regularly jails young black drug offenders, the majority of which are non-violent offenses. They are not going to contradict one another.

Early on in the trial, before Nelson allowed Martin's drug test results into evidence, my wife, who works at one of the big department stores, was in the break room on her job. The news played in the background on the television set as she chitchatted with about 5 co-workers, all black of various ages, most either mothers or grandmothers. Into the room comes a middle-aged, 50-ish white female employee who just starts up talking about the trial. There was no invitation for her to strike up a conversation, nor care or awareness as to whom she was talking to. Just her arrogant, know-it-all, intrusive whiteness sucking the air out the room. Or as my wife put it, "She was talkin' at us."

From the beginning, the white woman goes in on Martin saying, "Well you know he smoked that marijuana!" At that point, so I'm told, nobody responded to her. The black women all got up and left the room. And as they got out of the cussing-the-woman-out range, the conversation went:

"White people think they can say and do anything."

"He (Zimmerman) had no business following that boy."

"What's smoking pot got to do with anything?"

"He had no right to shoot that boy."

"I was about to lose my job."

"Me too!"

"Me too!"

"Me too!"

As I told that story to my friend she became quiet. I joked; didn't that white woman know she was talking to a group of *black* mothers? Then I mentioned Trayvon's mother, Sabrina. I went on to say how many blacks are extremely proud of the way she and her ex-husband, Tracy Martin, have taken the high road throughout this ordeal. "Dignified" is the word most often used, although I see it as one of those words that mean they didn't cuss white folks out. For the most, the parents have let attorney Crump do the attacking. Crump has repeatedly expressed what most blacks feel, "If Zimmerman had been killed, Trayvon Martin would have been drug-tested, immediately jailed without bond and put on trial for 1st degree murder facing the death penalty." Tracy Martin may have let down his guard once in the courthouse if one believes

Zimmerman's crew. On the first day of the trial, Zimmerman supporter Tim Tuchsalski claimed Martin called him a "motherfucker." If it happened, he lucky that's all he was called.

Even so, I went on to say to my friend that Sabrina Martin was becoming somewhat of an icon to many black people, much like what happened with Mamie Till, the mother of Emmett Till, who died at the hands of racists. I told her that for many blacks, Sabrina represents how they view black mothers and wives. And I said that many black women view themselves going through hell or high water for their kids, as she has done. That her strong bearing, dark-skin, motherly but attractive and sensual look, was the kind of woman that most southern black men married. That women like her had our kids and raise our families. For those who would denigrate dark-skinned women the response has long been "the blacker the berry the sweeter the juice."

In addition, Tracy Martin, though divorced, maintained a close relationship with his son and a respectful relationship with his ex-lover, ex-wife and mother of his child. He wasn't an absentee father. He seemed to be a good parent. But you just *knew* that a white man was going to play the irresponsible black parent game. Kind of like Obama does from time to time even though a Boston College study done a couple of years back revealed – surprisingly to some – that black fathers not living in the same domicile as their children are *more* likely to have a relationship with their kids than white fathers in similar circumstances.

I found myself posting photos of the parents and their sons on social media throughout the trial. Many others did as well. I did it because I wanted to remind myself and others what the trial was really about. And instead of getting angry at the mere sight of Zimmerman, I wanted to focus instead on the strength of Trayvon Martin's parents. I used words like "respect" and "strength" as captions to cut through efforts to dehumanize and denigrate the family and their slain son.

Zimmerman's defense team wanted words like "gang," "gang-related," "gun" or "drug-related" added to the story because they know that most of the time it strips "the accused" (who are usually black) of their human rights and humanity. They know that if some black kid's face on the news and the word gun or drug is mentioned, even blacks, unless they're family members, most often don't really care what happens to them. The defense's goal was to flip the script and make Martin the accused.

And the defense couldn't put the gun in Martin's hands so they did the next best thing – they tried to bring drugs into the game by advancing the old "Reefer Madness" myth arguing that "marijuana makes one violent." Back in the 80s and 90s, usually after a cop shot someone, they'd say the shooting victim was on PCP (angel dust) or crack and that the drug gave them super-human strength. I've haven't seen many super-strong crack heads in my lifetime but I've seen a lot of them wasting away to little or nothing. I've haven't seen all that many super-strong potheads either.

Painful as it was at times, I watched defense attorney West attempt to tar prosecution witness, 19-year-old Rachel Jeantel, as a stupid liar. Jeantel was on the phone with Martin the night Zimmerman killed him. She was the last person Trayvon spoke to. He told Jeantel he was being followed by a "creepy-ass cracker." Her testimony sparked a courtroom, online and television



argument and a trumped-up controversy with the premise that Martin calling Zimmerman a “cracker” made *Trayvon* the racist.

Then Jeantel came under attack from the “Precious”-ghetto-big-black (dark-skinned) girl-“mammy”-bashing crowd ... both black and white.

On the side of white privilege against Jeantel was Don West’s daughter Molly, who posted an Instagram photo showing the family enjoying ice cream after West’s contentious and contemptuous cross-examination of Jeantel. Molly West’s picture is accompanied with the description, “We beat stupidity celebration cones ... #dadkilledit.” Kind of reminds me of a lynching afterparty.

In response to the smearing of Jeantel, someone posted online a quote by James Baldwin that read: “It is not the black child’s language that is in question; it is not their language that is despised: It is their experience.”

On the black side of the attack – perhaps unknowingly injecting “light-skin” “high-yella” privilege” into the mix—was Olympian Lolo Jones, who’s had past public problems with “dark-skinned” black women who are more talented runners but ignored by media for reason of their complexion. Jones compared Jeantel to Tyler Perry’s character “Madea,” tweeting: “Rachel Jeantel looked so irritated during the cross-examination that I burned it on DVD and I’m going to sell it as Madea goes to court.” Like many others I went to her website, Twitter and Facebook pages to post – *Shame!*

Coming on the heels of the Paula Deen “n-word” blow-up, CNN devoted airtime to debate “Does cracker = nigger?”

I laughed sardonically as I told my friend, “A cracker cracks the whip that some poor nigger is at the business end of.”

I posted the Last Poet’s “Niggers are Scared of Revolution” to CNN’s Don Lemon’s Facebook page as an example of one “appropriate” use of the word. I added: Why should blacks (or whites or any other racial or ethnic group for that matter) buy into the idea that there’s a *word* that has so much “power” that when said by ‘anyone’ of another racial-ethnic group it causes one to take leave of their senses or become out of control? Why should a *word* be a prelude to fight? Have the power to make people act against their interest? Provoke a response that empowers the stereotype “These people are guided by emotion versus reason”? How can a *word* be an excuse to forgive violence? It can and does signal bigotry and if the bigot is one’s employer, it can signal and unveil discriminatory employment practices. For the racist, that word is tantamount to “sub-human” or “having no rights anyone is bound to respect.” You wanna talk about power? That word has *power*. Banning it just gives it *more* power. I think it’s better to teach, “Sticks and stones may break my bones but words can never hurt me.” That’s what I’ve told my kids through the years.

There are some who disagreed with me. One person suggested to me that there are such things as “fighting words” that ought to be banned or prohibited or a hate speech code of conduct. On

Lemon's show Columbia University professor Marc Lamont Hill said it is perfectly fine for black people to use the word but not whites. He said, "You just have to accept that there are some things in the world, just, at least one thing, that you can't do that black people can! That just might be okay."

I was listening to my young neighbor's (twenty-something) music the other night: the song "My Nigga" by YG, Young Jeezy & Rich Homie Quan (three southern rappers out of Atlanta). To me, the use of the term "my nigger" among black people can mean: "I love (or regard) you even though others think you're nothing." It's solidarity between "the damned & despised." Obviously, for whites, it's hard to be in "the damned & despised" group when you're doing all the damning & despising, thus whites using the word has been culturally verboten. Still, there are plenty of whites, often in the same socio-economic class, who grew up around blacks in an intimate way, who faced similar experiences as their black neighbors and are called 'nigger' (to their faces) by blacks. They take the moniker as a badge of acceptance, though they rarely reciprocate. It was even that way when I was growing up. That said, "My nigger" can also have a slavery connotation, as in "My boy."

Late in the evening on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July I went outside to sit on the front porch. I was drinking a little rum, puffing on a birthday joint, just thinking about things. Things like the trial, "creepy-ass cracker(s)," the n-word, the announced death of the Voting Rights Act, the split decision on affirmative action, Paula Deen, politicians talking about building a higher, longer wall on the border with Mexico and sending a "surge" of 20 or 30 thousand additional troops to guard it—no talk about a northern surge—the black unemployment rate continuing to rise and what it was doing to those around me. Just a host of things. It *all* seemed bad. Just a ton of bullshit, poison and ill will, all aimed at black people and people of color in the "colorblind," post-racial "new normal." It had rained on and off most of the day but it cleared up around 9ish. Fireworks and gunshots rang out continuously for more than an hour or so. I took it all in from my perch in the middle of a very black southern neighborhood. I could hear a helicopter in the distance. Folks were back on the grills they had abandoned earlier due to the rain. Across the railroad tracks from me (maybe 200 yards thru the woods and what's left of an old cemetery where blacks committed to the state mental asylum were buried) someone had their music turned up really, really loud. Cutting thru the smoke, dampness and fog of the night was "My Nigga." I'm sitting and laughing out loud thinking the "sweet smelling" black folks and white people would love this scene. BBQ and marijuana smells mixed together, gunshots, helicopter, black neighborhood, music. I'm also thinking that CNN and Don Lemon need to come talk to the folk back in the cut. And then some older person must have taken over the DJ duties. Frankie Beverly and Maze singing "Happy Feelings" took over the air and played for long while.

I go back in the house, jump online to see what's in my news feed and I saw a *New York Times* headline on the trial, "Race is an undertone of trial..." "*Undertone!*" Wow. How about "White supremacy and race privilege is everything America is?"

People, such as that headline writer, substituting the word "race" for "racism" to soften its true meaning and meanness always gets to me.



Drug testing Martin after the killing and not testing Zimmerman is just one of many privileges of racism and white supremacy granted to Zimmerman before a single charge was filed against him. I watched trial video of Zimmerman riding in a cop car after the killing and taking the detective on a tour of the crime scene while crafting his lies. No handcuffs. Front seat. I'm thinking, "Wow, they'd never let a *black* person to do such a thing."

I believe the Zimmerman trial is of greater racial and civil significance for blacks than the O.J. Simpson trial.

First of all, there's no epidemic of aging black ex-football player movie stars (allegedly) killing their young white wives and their boyfriends.

But there has been a dramatic increase in the number of black males killed by whites under "stand your ground" laws. White defendants who assert "stand your ground" as a justification for their acts of violence are more likely to prevail if the victim is black. Seventy-three percent of those who killed a black person faced no penalty compared to 59 percent of those who killed a white.

Yet in all likelihood, when a black person in Florida claims 'stand your ground' as a defense there's a good chance that that police, prosecutors and jury don't buy it. Not only did it not apply to Trayvon Martin, if you buy the jury's verdict, there's the story of Marissa Alexander, the 31-year-old Florida woman, charged and tried by State Attorney Angela Corey, the very same prosecutor who had jurisdiction over the Martin case. Alexander is serving a 20-year sentence following her conviction on three counts of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon for firing a single shot into a wall near her abusive ex-husband and his two young children at their Jacksonville home in 2010. Alexander says she wasn't trying to hurt anyone and that she was standing her ground against a man who had beat her on several different occasions. She said that she believed she was protected that day under the state's Stand Your Ground Law. Corey offered a plea bargain that would have sent her to prison for three years, but she rejected it, hoping to convince a jury that she simply had been defending herself. It took a jury *12 minutes* to find her guilty. If Alexander's future appeals are unsuccessful, and she serves her full 20-year term in prison, her twins will be 31-years-old when she is released. Her youngest will be 22.

Years ago someone said to me: "White folk believe that most blacks are criminals even if they've haven't ever been charged with a crime or haven't done time in jail." As my lawyer friend Efi Nwangaza put it: "To a racist, the average cop, and even the courts, most blacks are either busted or bustable. They just haven't been caught." In a nutshell, racial profiling takes away the "benefit of a doubt."

It's not so hard to imagine that Zimmerman's not guilty verdict might just give any white stranger the ammunition (pun intended), or gumption to approach any stranger black man on the street and ask them anything they want. Blacks now face a civilian version of the NYPD's dreaded "stop and frisk" in states with "Stand Your Ground" laws. it's tantamount to deputizing the six million conceal carry permit holders.

It doesn't take much to imagine questions like: "*What are you doing? Where are you going? Why are you here? Let's see some id?*" And what if the stranger black man tells his stranger white inquisitor to "back off" — with or without vulgarities, and the white man he doesn't know responds in a menacing way or tries to detain him or attempts to lay hands on him, and the black fellow fights for his life or something other than surrender himself to the stranger, how is it that *he* becomes the criminal and the stranger white man has the right to take his life?

It's nullification of the social contract — "you go your way, I'll go my way" between blacks and whites, especially men—that was established after Jim Crow.

It's also really not so far-fetched that this nation is publicly ruminating that there are some people within its borders, that can do nothing more than completely surrender themselves to an entitled stranger or the stranger becomes "the victim" and has the right to take their lives.

Sounds a lot like how the United States has treated the Iraqis and those it has labeled "terrorists." But then again, as someone said to me as we talked about the war on people of color, here and abroad, "To call a nigger a terrorist is redundant."

It's reminiscent of slavery and Jim Crow days whereby if a white man was walking on a sidewalk and a black person was walking towards him on the same sidewalk, the black person had to step into the ditch or road and give the white man the *whole* sidewalk to pass. It was a time when "blacks had no rights that any white man was bound to respect." But as Vernon Johns, the preacher who preceded Martin Luther King at Dexter Avenue Church in Montgomery, once said, "You have to have a license to hunt rabbits in the state of Alabama, but niggers are always in season."

I've also spoken with some black folks at various points during this tragedy who are quite open about protecting their children, homes and themselves. They say, "We got guns, too." They aren't gangbangers. Most are working-class, homeowners, prior military, rural, many sort of in the vein of Robert Williams, Jr., former president of the North Carolina NAACP, who wrote a book called *Negroes With Guns* about the right of self-defense for black families in the south.

One young family man, who is not suppose to have a gun or be around one either because he happens to have a couple of drug felonies on his record, told me something often said by 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment supporters: "Look, if it's about protecting myself or my family and I need or have to use a gun I'd rather be judged by 12 of my peers than carried by six."

One other thing that makes the Zimmerman case far more significant than Simpson's is that what Zimmerman is accused of, and the police are often guilty of, is denying people of color due process and equal treatment with their disparate use of official violence. And they're often willing to use deadly force even when their lives are not in danger and their victims are unarmed. According to the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, a black man, woman, or child died at the trigger of law enforcement or "the color of law" *every 28 hours* in 2012. And in most cases, had the alleged perpetrator been adjudicated and found guilty of a crime the sentence wouldn't have been the death penalty.

That's not to ignore the fact that black people kill other black people. According to the Justice Department, 93 percent of black victims were killed by other black people, and about 85 percent of white victims were slain by other white people. A majority — 51 percent — of the black murder victims are young — between 17 and 29. Comparatively, just over a third — 37 percent — of white people murdered are between the ages of 17 and 29. That tells us a couple of things. First, blacks don't kill whites and vice-versa, but laws like "stand your ground" might change that. And second, we need to deal with the issues that create the conditions for societal violence. Approximately 46 murders are committed each day in the U.S. and 27 of those will be killed by a gun. That's a total of about 16,700 each year. What we don't need are laws like "Stand Your Ground" that will only *increase* that number.

As I was talking to some young brothers the other night, they joked that "If Zimmerman had killed a white man, they'd drop the 'white' from the 'white Hispanic' description of him and he'd be just another mistreated 'Hispanic' instead of being able to pimp off playing white."

If Martin been a female teen of the same age that laid dead in the grass (the race of the victim would have also played a part), Zimmerman would have been charged with a crime on the spot.

Despite my contempt for Zimmerman — I still supported the idea that he was 'innocent until proven guilty' or as the jury decided 'not guilty.' Especially in the face of a criminal justice process that is routinely and institutionally unfair to people of color.

Protecting the theory is a good thing. From a progressive framework, the system should protect the rights of the accused whether we like the defendant or not. And it shouldn't be a system of revenge.

Revenge is the final, worrisome reaction to this trial. All one has to do is check out the comments in almost any article about Zimmerman posted on black-oriented media outlets and it's clear that a lot of people wish him dead and many have stupidly and publicly offered to kill him. Back in the period between the shooting and arrest, former heavy weight boxing champ Mike Tyson (who in 1992, was convicted of raping Desiree Washington, a beauty pageant contestant, and served 3 years in an Indiana prison) offered a death wish for Zimmerman: "...It's a disgrace that man hasn't been dragged out of his house and tied to a car and taken away. That's the only kind of retribution that people like that understand. It's a disgrace that man hasn't been shot yet. Forget about him being arrested—the fact that he hasn't been shot yet is a disgrace. That's how I feel personally about it."

Most of the death threats are probably not serious but a few very well might be.

A young brother was trying to convince me that had it been his child murdered, he'd would have gone up in the courtroom after Zimmerman. I told him he was talking nonsense and asked was he willing to harm or kill people that did him no harm just to get Zimmerman? I suggested that it would make him as bad or worse than Zimmerman. Someone else asked about the New Black Panthers. I said: "What they gonna do? Provocative pictures with members wearing bulletproof vest standing face-to-face with police? What can they do beyond pose?"

One Zimmerman hater wrote: “He (Zimmerman) has proven that he fears blacks and will kill them because of that fear. He’s a danger to black people and blacks would be within their right to shoot him in self-defense.”

After the verdict Atlanta Falcons wide receiver Roddy White Tweeted the jurors should “kill themselves.” Doubtless he backtracked the next day, as did many other players who in anger expressed violent sentiments. Which is pretty much what one would expect from employees in the “soft-core” (as compared to war or policing) violence industry.

I think Zimmerman should be in jail. Though that would be a *very* dangerous place for him. Still, I do have the compassion to fear for his life. I don’t support the death penalty by the government or by revenge seekers. To me, that’s one of the things that being ‘civilized’ is all about.

It’s very easy to kill a person. As *Michael Corleone said to Tom Hagen in the movie “Godfather II:”* “...If anything in this life is certain – *if* history has taught us anything – *it’s* that you *can* kill anybody.”

Worldwide an estimated 520,000 people are murdered each year. That’s an average of 1,477 per day per day. Two-fifths of them are young people between the ages of 10 and 29, killed by other young people. That doesn’t even include those killed in war. Like those murdered by U.S. soldiers in Iraq. And the deaths of those like 16-year-old Abdulrahman al-Awlaki, the son of Anwar al-Awlaki, an American al Qaeda propagandist killed by an Obama ordered drone in 2011 isn’t recorded as a murder. Not so ironically Robert Gibbs, former White House press secretary, sounded a lot like the Zimmerman defense attorney’s attack on Tracy Martin in a failed attempt to paint al-Awlaki as another “irresponsible black father.” Gibbs said the Colorado-born teen should have had a “more responsible father.” Some might think I’m off topic here, but to me, but I mentioned Abdulrahman al-Awlaki only to remind people that Obama did the same thing to him as Zimmerman did to Trayvon Martin. For me, he lacks the moral credibility to condemn Zimmerman and the outcome of the trial because he condemns strangers to death every Tuesday.

It’s easy to kill, but to be civilized is to help people live and to seek ways to end animosity and needless killing. And it’s a parent and adult’s duty to help young people get through the dangerous and stupid periods of their lives, where little things can become life altering or ending events. One can’t fall into the trap of criminalizing youth or youthful behaviors and fads. Or using blanket stereotypes. Or fearing and wanting to kill someone because they don’t *look* like you.

On the night prior to the verdict my friend Tony dropped by and the television was on with the trial coverage playing in the background. Tony, who manages a gospel radio network here in South Carolina, has twin 13-year-old sons. He relays to me that his sons have kind of followed the trial as kids tend to do. I mean, they’re not glued to the tube but they’re watching the process. So Tony says, “Andrew asked me ‘Dad, what’s happening with Zimmerman?’ And I say it’s with the jury. He responds, ‘We gotta wait?’” Tony continued, “It was then I realized that this

was shaping their (his sons) reality. They have white friends that they hang out with and now all this goes into their mix.”

A number of people have called or emailed or stopped by or asked me to stop by to help them sort out what they feel. Black kids have had their world shaken up by this verdict. They understand it wasn’t just a court case but a referendum on their value as human beings, and they lost.

I was talking to my son as his neighbor was walking up the street with his daughter. They heard our conversation on the decision and stopped. He said he had to talk to his daughter, who couldn’t have been more than 10 or 11. She was visibly sad. Yet it was beautiful to see a young father walking with his young daughter talking about something important albeit tragic. And their stopping to share their experience with my son and me was cool as well. That’s been the positive thing coming out of this tragedy. People are talking to one another in a different way. Children facing the prospect of early mortality. Parents responding in lots of ways, but *having* to respond. And this doesn’t just apply to blacks. Yet for the most, blacks are unified on the wrongness of it all. It’s white people who are divided.

As I struggled to finish this record of observations, a young father stopped by my house late in the evening. His 14-year-old son in response to the verdict said, “Daddy that’s messed up. What we gonna do?” The young father said he was trying to figure out a way to make his boy feel more secure and able to take care of himself. He says he is putting his son in a self-defense class and enrolling him in a gun training and safety class.

As I said from the start, I have a rock hard bias against Zimmerman. But my anger isn’t just about him. It’s about the repulsive and dangerous swirl of racism that is in the air right now in America. It’s shaping future generations in a very bad way.

Fulton and Martin plan to file a wrongful death civil case. I did a radio show with their attorney Benjamin Crump after the verdict in which he reminded listeners that the case would be heard in Seminole County, in the very same courthouse. In the meantime, as Zimmerman supporters scream about double jeopardy, the NAACP and others are pressing the Department of Justice to bring a federal civil rights case against the freed killer. Al Sharpton is trying to corral the rage over the verdict in support of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary March on Washington in late August. I hope this isn’t more of ‘the best way to control the opposition is to lead it...’ The last Trayvon Martin rally I attended in Columbia was organized by black Tea Partiers and the main speakers were a black democratic representative who supported stand your ground and a young wannabe politician who at the time was running for office and using Martin’s death as a platform for his own aims.

Stevie Wonder has said he’ll no longer play states with stand your ground laws but that will mean he’ll be mostly playing in Europe. At least thirty-three other states in addition to Florida (and counting) now have the same law (also called ‘Line In The Sand,’ ‘Make My Day,’ ‘Kill at Will’ or ‘No Duty To Retreat’) language and all. Those other states are – Alabama, Arizona, Connecticut, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Montana, Missouri, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Carolina,

North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Washington, West Virginia and Wisconsin. So instead of not going to the states, he ought to come in and help mobilize against the law – not as an entertainer but as a citizen.

Doubtless, racism is a hard nut to crack. Yet at the very least, maybe the groundswell of public pressure in support of Trayvon's parents Sybrina Fulton and Tracy Martin that forced Zimmerman's indictment will spread beyond his trial into a grassroots state-by-state movement to repeal "Stand Your Ground" laws. And as people organize against stand your ground, maybe they'll stay organized to take on what happening with voting rights, Medicaid funding, aid to the poor and a host of issues that we should have been fighting off or fighting for.

One can hope.

And right on cue. The day after the verdict, hundreds of miles away from Florida at Benny's Burritos on Greenwich Avenue and 12th in New York City. It was reported that a *drunken*, white, Goldman Sachs employee, "angry at both his job and his dissolving marriage" was passing a black couple eating at a burrito shop when he stumbled into their table. Douglas Reddish, 25, tried to help the man regain his balance, when the drunken man lashed out at him. "*This nigger wants to fight me!*" And, "*You niggers are why I lost my job.*" Shortly after that, Reddish punched the white guy in the face, knocked him out cold. The man hit his head on the curb. Paramedics arrived and rushed the man to Beth Israel Medical Center with brain trauma. Reddish took off after the assault, but was later arrested. He was arraigned in Manhattan Criminal Court for misdemeanor assault. He was released on his own recognizance. The man remains in critical condition—as does America.