

Zimmerman committed a crime, but not a hate crime



By Victor Lopez
STAFF WRITER

Some argue that George Zimmerman, the 28-year-old neighborhood watch captain who fatally shot 17-year-old Trayvon Martin on Feb. 26 in the central Florida town of Sanford, committed a racially motivated crime. At this juncture, I disagree.

Before you tell me I've gone stark mad and dismiss my thoughts, I urge you to read on. Zimmerman undoubtedly overstepped his bounds, and someone died.

Be that as it may, I think it's best to wait for the evidence to speak for itself before we accuse the man of committing a hate crime. Zimmerman might be guilty of many things. However, calling this a hate crime without hearing the bona fide facts is wrong, even if the subject matter has mobilized our nation.

According to the Christian Science Monitor, "The U.S. Justice Department could bring a hate crime charge against the shooter in the killing if there is sufficient evidence the slaying was motivated by racial bias and not simply a fight that spiraled out of control, legal experts and former prosecutors say."

A U.S. Department of Justice attorney and friend told me by phone that there are too many unknown factors at this point to pass judgment.

"You have to look at all the facts," this attorney told

The Guilfordian. "With the demonstrations, there is pressure on the judicial system to do something about what happened. Until all the facts are known, it's anyone's guess as to what the crime was, if there was a crime at all."

In the highly sensationalized, much politicized, wildfire debate regarding the Martin case there are three truths: Zimmerman's truth, the public's truth and the

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truth which we've yet to hear in completeness.

If the crime was racially motivated, Zimmerman deserves punishment to the full extent of the law. However, at this juncture it's not appropriate to say what motivated this unfortunate event until the case is presented to the grand jury.

We need facts, not rhetoric, even when the subject

matter involves racism and laws like Florida's "stand your ground" rule that kept Zimmerman out of jail, as it condones deadly force in a self-defense scenario.

Here's what we do know: a neighborhood watch captain — a "wannabe" cop — gunned down a black teen. Also, 911 tapes reveal Martin being identified as a "black" male.

We're also aware that Martin was unarmed and that the police dispatcher clearly directed Zimmerman to step down and allow the police to handle the situation. Reports also indicate Zimmerman sustained injuries during the altercation.

Zimmerman allegedly uttered a racial slur during his 911 call, though this has not been confirmed. Attempts to decipher the mumbling produced by the recordings with the ease of sandpaper may, in the end, be considered unreliable evidence.

What the media has yet to address is the larger issue at play, an ember that I hope will not diminish after Martin's death is just a memory to the public eye: we are still a very racist society.

Outrage, protests and mounting pressure on those in power to hold Zimmerman accountable for taking a life is an understandable reaction. We need real truths, not immediate gratification by way of labeling an act without fully understanding what took place.

A young black teen being killed reminds some that, where race and perception is concerned, we've still a long way to go.

Until the complete facts are examined in Zimmerman's case, I refuse to allow all the media analysis and scapegoating techniques to affect my judgment one way or another. Until those true facts are presented to a grand jury, I'm staying tuned.

Playback: how do you feel about the U.S. presidential campaign?

STUDENTS AND STAFF OFFER THEIR OPINIONS ABOUT THE DRAMA SWIRLING AROUND THE 2012 ELECTIONS, WHICH ARE JUST SEVEN MONTHS AWAY

"I feel that the GOP candidates are dragging out the primary race too long. At this point, they're just digging themselves a hole.

Mitt Romney is probably the best candidate they have, but he's too much of a flip-flopper. Rick Santorum is an idiot, and Ron Paul is still crazy. I didn't even know Newt was still in it. I'm not the biggest Barack Obama fan, but I guess he is the lesser of the two evils."

Elijah DaCosta, senior

"I generally feel like the candidates are too far apart on the spectra of their issues, and they lack leadership skills. Overall, they're too extreme in one direction or the other to successfully lead a country the size of the United States."

Caroline Oldfield, senior

"The current campaign is a perfect example as to why women should just be put in charge of EVERYTHING."

Susie Williams, CCE senior

"When I'm at home I keep up with the news, but when I'm at Guilford I don't really follow the campaign at all."

Nora Cooke, sophomore

"I don't follow it much because it's so depressing. The things the candidates say about each other and the economy makes you feel depressed, especially if you realize it actually works."

Sara Besmertnik, sophomore

"Americans live under the mistaken impression that our elections still matter. Warlords give way to monarchs give way to nations give way to corporations. Power wears a different mask for each time and/or culture, but remains where it always has: in the hands of the few. A gross oversimplification of empire, but true nonetheless."

Phillip Arthur, CCE senior

Compiled by Aaron Hall

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