

OPINION/ FORUM

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Petitioning for Justice



Ben Jealous
Guest Columnist

voice in angry protest can be ignored, but when one million people speak as one - and thousands more take to the street in peaceful protest, rallies and vigils - we can change the world.

So what comes next? As we closely follow the Department of Justice's investigation, we must continue to draw on our collective outrage and refuse to let the memory of Trayvon Martin fade from the hearts and minds of the nation.

Trayvon Martin's death did not occur in a vacuum. Ours was supposed to be the first generation of black Americans to be judged not by our race or the color of our skin. Instead, we find ourselves to be the most murdered generation in the country and the most incarcerated on the planet. Meanwhile, racial profiling continues to rear its ugly head in law enforcement and civilian life alike.

At this moment we have a chance to address some of these societal ills. We have a chance to challenge racial profiling in all its forms, and to fight the underlying cause of violence in our communities - by the good guys and bad guys alike.

This last year, we have already changed the world. Not a single state in the continental United States has passed a "stand your ground" law in 2013 - the first time in eight years. And last month the New York City Council passed a strong bill banning the racially abusive practice of "stop and frisk" policing, after hundreds of thousands of people protested in the name of Trayvon.

We have a choice. We can be felled by our sorrows over the jury's decision. Or we can turn our frustration into action. We will demand the Department of Justice address the travesties of this tragedy. We will advance our movement to end racial profiling in America.

And with one million people at our back, we will make sure that the memory of Trayvon Martin never fades from the hearts and minds of this nation.

Sign the NAACP's petition at www.naacp.org.

Ben Jealous is president/CEO of the NAACP.



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Reject Duke Energy hike

To the Editor:

If the proposed Duke Energy rate hike is approved, residential consumers will be paying an average of \$14 more a month for the electricity they use. Many residents are retired and on a fixed income and the Social Security cost-of-living adjustments are not keeping pace with these increases. With North

Carolina's high poverty rate, I know there are many families that are struggling.

Last year, nearly a quarter of a million people had their power "cut off" in North Carolina, largely due to non-payment. Another increase will make this problem even worse. Older adults rely on affordable energy to stay healthy, while attempting to age-in-place, in their homes. Duke's regular rate increases pose a real as well as a serious threat to

health and economic security. Many residents are faced with the decision to purchase food, medication and other medical services, pay rent and/or mortgages or attempt to live in the comfort of cool or warm living quarters. This decision making process results in physical, mental and emotional difficulties, subsequently negatively impacting quality of life and in many instances, the outcome is pre-mature death. Unfortunately, North

Carolina is one of the worst states when it comes to hunger with one-out-of ten adults over age 50 being "food insecure." Duke is already highly profitable, while many residents are suffering. Now is not the time for rate increases. I urge others who share my concern to let the Utilities Commissioners know how rate hikes are hurting residents!

Althea Taylor-Jones, PhD
Winston-Salem

Language of the Zimmerman trial



Bill Turner
Guest Columnist

With the oft-repeated definition of insanity - doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results - etched on my brain, I tuned in, occasionally, to the trial and news analyses centered around George Zimmerman for killing Trayvon Martin. When the verdict was rendered, I was frustrated and a bit troubled, but I was not in the least bit surprised. I have not let America's lunacy where race is concerned drive me crazy.

Racism - and its linked effects and results - saturates the whole social fabric with the consequence of what author Wendell Berry titled one of his best books - The Hidden Wound. Our collective neurosis, this invisible injury - a disorder which many refuse to acknowledge - has a clear resulting condition that affects all of us. Nowhere recently has the insanity caused by racism been displayed more prominently than in Sanford, Florida.

I knew the Zimmerman trial was headed into the land of the loopy and the loony when the lady judge prohibited the use of racial profiling and Zimmerman's zany attorney, Don West, led off with a tasteless "knock-knock" joke. From the moment the deliberations began with the assertion that "this trial is not about race," I knew straightaway that the side best able to disguise, distort, and reverse the meaning of racially-charged words and images would prevail.

Trayvon's star witness, Rachel Jeantel - of Haitian descent - was best at what the cable news commentators called "unintelligible mishmash." Apparently, the predominantly white female jury took better notes when the language

was what George Orwell called DoubleSpeak in his work of fiction titled 1984, published more than six decades ago. The jurors were allowed to jot down the phrase "creepy crazy cracker" as quoted from Trayvon's mouth. The right of Mr. Zimmerman to "stand his ground" when he shot through Trayvon's heart was graphically argued, but the panel of his peers were not allowed to reflect on the role of racial profiling as a part of the case. Race was the least important yet the most significant factor in the courtroom.

"Stand your ground" is an intentionally ambiguous and confusing legal terminology. Now that George Zimmerman has been found not guilty, others of his breed can provoke a fight and if they get bested, they can kill whomever they attack, and walk; providing, of course, that the fatality is a black kid "armed with a sidewalk."

Now that the racially polarizing trial is over, the Tea Party crowd that has stood their ground so confrontationally with Zimmerman can go back to pulling the earth from beneath another black person - the President - although their irrational pigheadedness is not at all about his race, background, education, and uppity mannerisms.

Many Americans - lots more whites than blacks - do not believe the verdict in the George Zimmerman trial was just the latest example of the biases against young Black males of a racist, oppressive criminal justice system that continues to grow. However, I am still crazy enough to believe that we shall overcome.

Bill Turner is a Texas-based educator and writer.

Looking Beyond Zimmerman



Julianne Malveaux
Guest Columnist

Trayvon Martin might not be dead except for the fact that George Zimmerman carried a gun and acted as a wanna-be policeman. Rev. Al Sharpton and others deserve props for rallying people and insisting that Zimmerman be brought to trial.

Anytime a gun goes off, I think somebody has to go to trial, simply to ensure that their actions be accounted for. Zimmerman was found not guilty, but at least he has been made somewhat accountable for his actions.

Zimmerman isn't the only one slaughtering young Black men, though. Too many of our young brothers are slaughtering each other. In Washington, D.C., rising senior Omar Adam Sykes was killed on Independence Day. He was a victim of an attempted robbery, when two men approached he and a friend with guns. The Howard University police say that robberies on campus are on the decline, but I don't think that Omar Sykes' parents find that any consolation. Indeed, one young Black man lost to gun violence is too many, whether the perpetrator was a vigilante like George Zimmerman, or another young Black man who is so desperate for dollars that he will kill another brother.

Seventy-four people were shot, and a dozen killed in gun violence in Chicago during the July 4 weekend. Two of them were young boys, aged 5 and 7. Much of this is

gang violence, and too many of the victims were in the wrong place at the wrong time. No matter. This scourge of gun violence is a plague on our nation, but especially on the African-American community.

There are many heart-breaking stories of those who are massacred. Young men and women at the cusp of adulthood who happened to be "hanging out" with friends on the wrong corner. Fathers who agitated an enraged driver. Children who "got in the way" of a random bullet. The NRA says that guns don't kill, people do. But people without guns can perhaps wreak havoc without creating a fatality.

Every year, 4.5 million firearms, including about two million guns, have been sold. What if George Zimmerman had not had a gun? If he did what he was told to do, police officers may have come and questioned Trayvon as he proceeded to the house of his daddy's friend. Or perhaps there may have been a fist fight. There surely would not have been a deadly bullet, and while Zimmerman was the slayer, our gun laws are complicit in Trayvon Martin's execution.

How many young people have been victims of unintended violence, victims of drive by violence, people just minding their business and losing their lives for minding their business? How many people with axes to grind would whoop and holler instead of carrying guns to workplaces, schools and other places?

As we mourn for Trayvon Martin, let us also recognize the scourge of gun violence. If we restricted gun ownership, this tragedy, and thousands of others, may not have happened.

Julianne Malveaux is a Washington, D.C.-based economist and writer. She is President Emerita of Bennett College for Women.