

Thousands march to demand arrest of Trayvon Martin killer

Andre Damon, C.W. Rogers in Sanford Florida
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Thousands of people took part Monday in a protest in Sanford, Florida, to demand the arrest of George Zimmerman, the killer of Central Florida teen Trayvon Martin.

The march, which marked the one-month anniversary of Martin's death, was accompanied by dozens of demonstrations involving tens of thousand of people throughout the country. The incident has sparked widespread popular indignation and international attention.

"If Zimmerman won't be arrested, anybody can get away with anything; anybody can get away with murder," said Shylyndria Richardson, a local high school student who attended the rally.

In an effort to blunt the public impact of the march, the Sanford Police on Monday leaked an account by Zimmerman claiming that Martin attacked him, and that Zimmerman shot Martin in self-defense. The only direct evidence—the 911 recordings from Zimmerman's calls—make clear that, despite explicit instructions not to, Zimmerman actively pursued the unarmed Martin, who was simply walking through the neighborhood.

The police leak followed the release of information that Martin had been suspended from school for possession of a baggie that had previously contained marijuana.

Sybrina Fulton, Trayvon's mother, denounced the police leak. "They have killed my son," she said, "and now they are trying to kill his reputation."

Meanwhile state prosecutors are seeking to condition public opinion for a decision not to bring charges against Zimmerman. Citing the right-wing "stand your ground" law in Florida, state attorney Angela Corey told ABC News, "It makes the case in general more difficult than a normal criminal case."

The demonstration in Sanford was attended by Al

Sharpton, Jesse Jackson and other supporters of the Democratic Party, who attempted to divert the anger of the demonstrators behind racial politics. They sought to remove any discussion of the broader social and political issues behind the killing from the day's events.

The march in Sanford proceeded through downtown and ended at the city's civic center, where the city commission invited Martin's parents to speak. Hundreds of people waited to get a space to watch the meeting, and thousands more watched the event on big screens in a field outside.

"The way the police department handled the case was wrong," said Ms. Richardson, 19. "It's been a month now, and Zimmerman is still free."

"If it wasn't for his parents staying strong against this, it would happen every day. A lot of this has happened in the past, but no one has been as strong as Trayvon Martin's family."

"I'm a part of the youth around here, and I want justice. A lot of the adults don't reach to us as human beings; they look at us like children. Today I was in school, and the teacher and principal told us not to talk about the Trayvon Martin case."

"The hypocrisy in America is very clear," added Eric Williams, a 21-year-old college student from Jacksonville, Florida. "I mean, some of us are privileged, and some are not."

"You can't let this slide, because it's going to be your kid next. It could be my nephew next," Eric said. "It's inspiring to see all these people out here. You have people of all races here together to stand up for something."

Eldrick Williams, Marcus Schuler, and Antoine Shuller were selling bottles of water out of the back of their truck at the rally.

“What happened to Trayvon shouldn’t happen to anybody,” said Eldrick Williams. “Zimmerman called the police. They told him not to mess with this man, that they got a patrol car coming, and he still followed him.

“It’s hard to survive around here in Florida; with the jobs and the way things are going right now,” he added. “People don’t want to hire you; you’ve got a lot of companies closing down.”

Frederick Preston, a documentary filmmaker from Jacksonville, was selling t-shirts at the rally. “It’s not a black or white thing, even though as black people we face injustice all the time.

“This country is filled with so much inequality and injustice. Take just education as an example—there’s inequality in schools, inequality in text books, inequality in teachers, in buildings. In my opinion it isn’t that most kids are dropping out of school; they’re being forced out of school by these conditions.

“All of the politicians are making statements about this because it’s an election year. But this kind of thing happens all the time. Trayvon isn’t the only one. He’s not even the only one in the month of February. Come next Monday morning, when the crowds go away and the yelling and cheering stops, it’s going to be back to business as usual. Right now they all are just after votes.

“Obama is no different. He makes a statement now, but what’s really going to change? Come Monday it’s going to be business as usual.

“I have two sons and I can so easily see myself being in the position of Trayvon’s parents,” he added. “I’m just so sick of young people being considered guilty just because of their clothes or the color of their skin.

“I think for everyone this incident is just a matter of ‘enough is enough.’ It’s a combination of everything—gas prices, housing prices, foreclosures, no jobs—and now on top of all that, you can just shoot us. And what makes this so frightening is that this wasn’t even the police but an ordinary citizen. I just keep thinking how easily this could happen to me.”



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