

More troubling facts emerge in the Trayvon Martin shooting

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The brutal shooting of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida has generated outrage within wide layers of the population in the US. Demonstrations have taken place in dozens of cities, and the incident has become a means for thousands to express their protest against many aspects of American life.

Meanwhile, Florida authorities have seen to it that material aimed at discrediting Martin in the eyes of the public has been leaked to the media. New facts have also emerged about the family background of the gunman in the episode, 28-year-old neighborhood watch captain George Zimmerman, which shed possible light on the refusal of the authorities to proceed against him.

Martin's parents are fighting to bring Trayvon's killer to trial. They have appeared at rallies in New York City, Sanford, Florida and at a House panel held yesterday in Washington, DC. At each public event, they have called for justice for their son to prevent such tragedies from happening in the future.

Florida authorities claim that the so-called Stand Your Ground law passed in Florida in 2005 is the legal obstacle to the prosecution of Martin's killer. (See "Florida shooting focuses attention on "Stand Your Ground" laws".) Such laws permit someone to use deadly force, i.e., kill another human being, when he or she feels threatened by that individual's behavior.

These measures go beyond the Castle doctrine, which states that within one's home, a person has no duty to retreat from a threatening situation, and extend this principle to public areas outside the home. In fact, none of these laws have anything to do with legitimate self-

defense and everything to do with whipping up law-and-order hysteria and social backwardness.

The passage of Stand Your Ground Laws in as many as 21 US states is a product of the last three decades of political reaction and parallels the vast changes in the concentration of wealth in American society.

The authorities in Florida, deeply discredited by their inaction in the Martin case, are now waging a campaign to discredit the victim. The *Orlando Sentinel* has published leaked statements, for example, indicating that at the time of his shooting, Trayvon was suspended from school for possessing traces of marijuana. Other supposed disciplinary incidents in the boy's life have been published by the newspaper. The leaks prompted the youth's mother, Sybrina Fulton, to declare, "They killed my son and now they want to kill his reputation."

Also, witnesses have been interviewed by major media outlets claiming to have seen Trayvon knocking Zimmerman down and pummeling him while he was on the ground.

In any event, the fact that Zimmerman has not been arrested indicates that the state's investigation is being organized as a perfunctory response to the popular anger.

State attorney Angela Corey was named only last week as special prosecutor in the Martin case—three weeks after Trayvon's killing. Interviewed on CNN yesterday, Corey said, "We met with the parents just yesterday ... and we have asked that all public statements be limited to the process and not to the facts."

It has been more than one month since the shooting of Trayvon Martin: a state investigation has barely been organized, the killer has not been charged or arrested, information is leaked to the press to vilify the victim and the authorities ask the public to place their trust in “the process.”

Information has emerged that the lead investigator in the Trayvon Martin shooting case urged the arrest of the killer on manslaughter charges, but was told by higher-ups not to proceed. According to ABC News, “Sanford, Fla., Investigator Chris Serino was instructed not to press charges against Zimmerman because the state attorney’s office headed by Norman Wolfinger determined there wasn’t enough evidence to lead to a conviction.”

Serino filed an affidavit on the night of the shooting, February 26, after hours of questioning, stating that he was unconvinced of Zimmerman’s story.

Facts are also emerging about Zimmerman’s past, which suggest a deeply troubled individual. First of all, there is his police record, which for a man seemingly obsessed with a career in law enforcement is a contradiction at best.

Msnbc.com obtained court documents revealing Zimmerman’s several run-ins with authorities. In 2005, as a 20-year-old, he was arrested and charged with “resisting an officer with violence” and “battery of law enforcement officer.” Both charges are third-degree felonies. The charges stemmed from Zimmerman’s shoving a police officer who was questioning a friend for underage drinking.

The document reported that the charges were subsequently reduced to “resisting an officer without violence” and later waived altogether when Zimmerman attended an alcohol education program.

Also in 2005, Zimmerman’s ex-fiancée, Veronica Zuazo, filed a motion for a restraining order against him. He was arrested on a domestic violence charge.

In light of his record, Zimmerman’s ability to hang

around the fringes of law enforcement, get a permit to carry a concealed 9mm hand gun and appoint himself as the head of the neighborhood watch with the backing of the Sanford Police Department certainly raises questions.

In 2008, Zimmerman took a citizen’s police academy program offered by the Seminole County Sheriff’s Department and was attending Seminole State College with the intention of getting a law enforcement degree.

Perhaps the most significant factor of all is that Zimmerman’s father, Robert Zimmerman, is a retired Orange County magistrate judge. He has been very vocal in the case, recently writing a letter to the *Orlando Sentinel* chiding people against jumping to conclusions, defending his son’s character and claiming that Zimmerman never followed Martin.

It seems reasonable to ask—did Zimmerman’s father influence the decision not to arrest him for Martin’s killing? And could his connections have smoothed over the younger Zimmerman’s transgressions, allowing this evidently troubled individual to be on the streets armed and looking for “bad guys?”



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