

New evidence against shooter in death of Trayvon Martin

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Newly released audio and video recordings have strengthened the case against the neighborhood watch vigilante who shot to death Trayvon Martin, further exposing the refusal of local and state officials in Florida to take any action against the killer.

The 17-year-old black youth was shot February 26 by George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch volunteer in the town of Sanford, near Orlando, as Martin walked back from a local 7-11 to the apartment where he and his father were staying. Martin was unarmed, carrying only a can of iced tea and a pack of Skittles, when Zimmerman opened fire.

Recordings of the fire rescue dispatcher on the night of Martin's death, made public Monday, revealed that a second ambulance was called to the scene. It was canceled after police determined that Zimmerman did not need medical attention.

Zimmerman told them he shot Martin in self-defense. Zimmerman's father and brother have claimed that Martin attacked him and knocked him to the ground, then pounded his head into the sidewalk pavement, inflicting cuts and bruises, before he fired his weapon. The cancelation of the ambulance suggests that police saw no serious injuries when they arrived on the scene.

A spokesman for lawyers representing the Martin family said there was "not a chance" the ambulance would have been canceled if Zimmerman's account of a "life and death" struggle with the 17-year-old boy were true.

CCTV footage taken inside the Sanford police station also undermined the shooter's account. The footage shows no visible injuries to Zimmerman's face or neck.

An eyewitness account of the attack also contradicted Zimmerman's claims that he had been badly roughed up by Trayvon Martin before pulling the trigger. According to press reports, the witness saw

Zimmerman walking away from Martin's lifeless body with no blood or other injury visible.

Expert analysis of the 911 call about the incident also discredits Zimmerman's account. The call was placed by a resident of the Twin Lakes subdivision, where the killing took place, who heard the encounter between the gunman and the youth, and called police. During the call, a voice can be heard screaming for help, followed by the fatal gunshot.

Zimmerman has reportedly claimed that he, not Martin, was the one calling for help. The *Orlando Sentinel* commissioned two experts in audio analysis to compare Zimmerman's voice to the voice on the tape of the 911 call: Tom Owen, chair emeritus for the American Board of Recorded Evidence, and Ed Primeau, a Michigan-based sound engineer. Both agreed that the voice calling for help was definitely not Zimmerman.

The experts could not determine scientifically whether it was Trayvon Martin for lack of a sample of the teenager's voice, but Primeau told the *Sentinel*, "I believe that's Trayvon Martin in the background, without a doubt. That's a young man screaming." Martin was 17 when he died, while Zimmerman is 28.

This accumulation of evidence refutes the claims of Sanford police and local prosecutors that there was no basis for investigating Zimmerman on charges of manslaughter or homicide after the shooting.

Sanford police detective Chris Serino, who initially handled the case, was not persuaded by Zimmerman's claim of self-defense and wanted to bring manslaughter charges. He was overruled by state attorney Norm Wolfinger, the prosecutor whose district includes Sanford. Wolfinger has since removed himself from the case and been replaced by a state-appointed independent counsel, Angela Corey.

On Monday, lawyers acting for the Martin family submitted a formal request to the US Department of Justice for a federal civil rights investigation into whether Wolfinger acted improperly in blocking the investigation by Serino.

A letter from Tracy Martin and Sybrina Fulton alleges that Wolfinger met with the Sanford police chief within hours of the teen's death and that together they overruled Serino's recommendation that Zimmerman be charged with manslaughter. The letter claims the police investigator filed an affidavit stating that he didn't find Zimmerman's story credible.

The Justice Department has already opened an investigation into the actions of the Sanford police in dropping the investigation and failing even to secure the crime scene where Martin was gunned down. The next step in that probe was also announced Monday, as the FBI revealed that it had begun a "parallel investigation" into the case. FBI agents began door-to-door interviews in the Twin Lakes subdivision.

While the state's independent counsel will determine whether criminal charges should be brought against Zimmerman for his actions in killing Trayvon Martin—a grand jury is to meet April 10 to review the evidence—the FBI will gather evidence on whether civil rights charges can be brought. This would require proving that Zimmerman targeted Martin because of his race.

Demonstrations continued over the weekend against the actions of local and state officials in refusing to charge Zimmerman. Several thousand people marched Saturday in Sanford, and another thousand took part in a rally in Miami, Trayvon's hometown, where his mother and father participated. Other rallies were held around the United States, in major cities like Seattle and Chicago, and in several university towns.

At the Miami rally, Tracy Martin spoke briefly about his son's death, and pledged to keep fighting "for my Trayvon and for your Trayvon." Alonzo Mourning, a retired professional basketball player for the Miami Heat, told the crowd, "Each and every one of us feels the pain of this family simply because Trayvon Martin could have been one of all of us." Singers Chaka Khan and Betty Wright also voiced their support.

The vast majority of those turning out to the rallies have been working people horrified by the events surrounding the death of the unarmed black youth,

including many young people and students, black, white and Hispanic.

The principal speakers at most of these events, however, have been Democratic Party politicians and figures like Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton, who presented the issue entirely in racial terms, in order to obscure the more fundamental class issues that are at stake, particularly the promotion of "law and order" vigilantism and police violence as part of the buildup of the repressive forces of the capitalist state.

There are no doubt discussions between the Obama administration, Jackson and Sharpton, and local officials over the best way to proceed. Any action, including the intervention of the federal government, will be from the standpoint of seeking to contain and redirect the mass opposition that has erupted over the killing of Martin.



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