

Prosecutor files charges in killing of Trayvon Martin

Our reporter
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The prosecutor investigating the killing of Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida announced Wednesday that the state would file charges of second degree murder against George Zimmerman, Martin's killer. The charges carry a maximum sentence of life in prison.

Special prosecutor Angela Corey made a point of insisting that her decision was not the result of popular protests. However, the announcement came after weeks of demonstrations over the killing of Martin and the refusal of the police to arrest Zimmerman.

Corey said that Zimmerman, 28, was in custody somewhere in Florida. A charge of second degree murder, as opposed to first degree murder, is brought in cases where there is no premeditation. It carries a mandatory sentence of 25 years when a firearm is used.

Martin, a 17-year-old African American youth, was killed while walking through a gated community where his father lives. He was unarmed. He was pursued and then shot by Zimmerman, the head of the neighborhood watch group.

Police and the state attorney initially refused to arrest or charge Zimmerman, dismissing recommendations from the chief investigator in the case. Sanford police cited Florida's "Stand Your Ground Law," which allows individuals to use deadly force without an obligation to retreat. They said they did not have any evidence to counter Zimmerman's claims of self-defense.

Corey was assigned to the case on March 22 after the police chief resigned and the first prosecutor recused himself.

Martin's parents, Sybrina Fulton and Tracy Martin, led a campaign to demand an arrest in the case. Protests involving thousands of people were held in cities throughout the country. The killing struck a chord with a broad sentiment that the police and political system

are unjust, reflected in the fact that a young man can be killed in cold blood and his killer not arrested.

The killing of Martin was also condemned by officials of both political parties, including President Obama. The Justice Department announced its own investigation. The principal aim of this intervention was to ensure that the popular outrage over the killing was safely contained within establishment channels. Even New York City's billionaire mayor, Michael Bloomberg, who presides over a police force notorious for brutality, has called for the repeal of "Stand Your Ground" laws.

Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton and other figures in and around the Democratic Party intervened to promote racial politics in an effort to obscure the deeper social, political and economic issues involved.

The family and the initial protests stressed the injustice involved, rather than the race of Martin and Zimmerman, who is Hispanic. This sentiment is still broadly felt. The Associated Press quoted one protester outside of Sanford City Hall Wednesday as saying, "It's not a black or white thing for me. He needed to be arrested."

Zimmerman will be brought before a court sometime on Thursday, when he will have an opportunity to request bail.



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