

Trayvon Martin Case Provokes Justice and Race Debate

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/2013/07/trayvon-martin-case-provokes-justice-and-race-debate>

On the night of February 26, 2012, 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was shot and killed in a Florida neighborhood while on his way home from a convenience store. The killing opened emotional debates about racial profiling and self-defense laws.



The man who killed Trayvon Martin was 28-year-old George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch volunteer who decided to follow Martin as the teenager walked back from a trip to a convenience store. There was a scuffle that ended when Zimmerman shot Martin in chest. Zimmerman claimed protection under the [Florida's Stand Your Ground Law](#), which gives people the liberty to use deadly force if they believe their lives are in danger.

For nearly three weeks the jurors listened to testimony about what happened the night Martin was killed, trying to make sense of the struggle, and who was the aggressor. Martin was unarmed, but the defense claimed that he used the concrete sidewalk as a "weapon" against Zimmerman.

With only one eyewitness, Zimmerman, and a lack of evidence, a jury made up of six women found Zimmerman not guilty of second-degree murder and he was acquitted of all charges on July 13, 2013.

Verdict sparks protests

On the night of the confrontation, Zimmerman told 911 dispatchers that a “real suspicious guy” looked like he was “up to no good.” The police dispatcher told Zimmerman not to pursue Martin, but Zimmerman decided to act.

Following the verdict announcement, people took to the streets and social media to voice their reactions. Hundreds of protesters in Los Angeles closed down 10 Freeway chanting “Justice for Trayvon,” and thirteen people were arrested on the third night of protests. Police in Atlanta said more than 2,000 demonstrators gathered outside of the CNN Headquarters. In Washington, D.C., peaceful protests started around midnight Saturday and continued Sunday morning and in New York City, hundreds of protesters marched into Times Square.

President Obama released a statement saying: “The death of Trayvon Martin was a tragedy. Not just for his family, or for any one community, but for America. I know this case has elicited strong passions. And in the wake of the verdict, I know those passions may be running even higher. But we are a nation of laws, and a jury has spoken.”

Meanwhile the Twitterverse was up in arms with people from all over the country expressing their views in tweets and hashtags. [Celebrities also participated](#), with Solange Knowles tweeting a picture from a rally for Trayvon while her sister Beyonce held a moment of silence in honor of Martin during her Mrs. Carter World Tour concert in Nashville Saturday evening.

Zimmerman may still face other charges

While criminal charges against Zimmerman were dropped, U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder has vowed to pursue a federal investigation. On the Monday after the verdict, Holder told a convention of the nation's largest black sorority that he shares concerns about “the tragic, unnecessary shooting” and the federal government is “determined to meet division and confusion with understanding and compassion – and also with truth.”

More than 460,000 people have signed a MoveOn.org online petition by the NAACP, urging the Justice Department to open a civil rights case against Zimmerman.

The Martin family also has the option to pursue a civil case against Zimmerman, though they have not said whether they are planning to do so.

-- Compiled by Mallory Sofastaii for NewsHour Extra

Using NewsHour Extra Feature Stories

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July 17, 2013

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Estimated Time: One 45-minute class period with possible extension

Trayvon Martin Questions and Lesson Activities for Middle School

Materials: Blank glossary and warm up questions sheet, Glossary key sheet

Warm Up Questions

1. What is your definition of justice? Give an example of a time when justice was either served or not served in your own life or the life of someone you know.
2. Should a person be able to defend him or herself if he or she is in danger of being hurt or even killed? Should he or she be able to use any weapon (including guns) to keep him or herself safe?
3. Do you feel that people of different races are treated equally in today's society? Give an example when you have experienced or seen unequal treatment.

Class Activity (45 minutes)

1. Give students a blank page of the terms in the glossary and in partners have them write down definitions to see what they already know.
2. Have students complete warm up questions (on back of blank glossary page)
3. In small groups have students share their answers with each other.
4. Give students the answer key and have them verbally provide a real world examples for each word.
5. Read the article (either individually or as a class), and watch any video components, keeping in mind the warm up questions as a guide or perspective to process the story. Have each student write down one thing that surprised them from the text and video to share with the class.

6. Ask students if after reading and watching the story has anything changed from how they answered their warm up questions?
7. Ask the class to consider Florida's "Stand Your Ground Law" which allows people to defend themselves with deadly force as long as they "responsibly believe" it is necessary to protect themselves. Is this a fair law?

Choose from the activities listed below that best fits the needs of your class:

1. Written assignment- You be the lawyer!

- In pairs, ask students to brainstorm key ideas that they would use as evidence to prove their case first for the prosecution, and then for the defense. Remember the charge was second degree murder. In Florida, "To prove second degree murder, a prosecutor must show that the defendant acted according to a 'depraved mind' without regard for human life. Florida state laws permit the prosecution of second degree murder when the killing lacked premeditation or planning, but the defendant acted with enmity toward the victim or the two had an ongoing interaction or relationship. Unlike first degree murder, second degree murder does not necessarily require proof of the defendant's intent to kill." - from Findlaw.com
- Individually allow students to expand on their key ideas for either the prosecution or defense, and write one paragraph for each key idea citing evidence from the text, video and timeline. Prepare your case as though you were presenting your argument to a jury who will be deciding whether George Zimmerman is guilty of second degree murder or is innocent.

2. Speaking and Listening assignment - A class divided!

In pairs ask students to brain storm key ideas that they would use as evidence to prove their case first for the prosecution, and then for the defense.

1. Have students go to opposite sides of the classroom based on:
 - If they feel that George Zimmerman was guilty of second degree murder
 - If they feel that George Zimmerman was innocent of second degree murder
2. Have students put their ideas together and have students present their three strongest arguments for their guilty or not guilty verdict to the other side of the class.

Take turns and allow students to move from different side of the room after students present their side.

- As a class come up with a working definition of justice
3. Now ask students to consider whether they believe that justice was served by the verdict given by the Florida jury. Have students go to different sides of the classroom based on if they felt justice was served or not.
 4. Repeat the process of each side brainstorming and then presenting their strongest three arguments to the class. Take turns and allow students to switch sides after both arguments have been shared.
 5. Have students return to their seats and as a class de-brief about their experience during the activity. Was one question easier to answer than the other? Was anything said that changed their mind, or made them feel less sure about the side they were on?

Homework

1. The not guilty verdict and acquittal of all charges against George Zimmerman has angered many people who feel that justice was not served because Trayvon Martin was an African American teenager. Do you believe that race played a role in the jury's judgment? What does this demonstrate about our country's ability to provide justice for all? Discuss these questions with two people you know.

You may want to review the [transcript of the call](#) placed between Zimmerman and the police dispatcher.

2. Find out if your state has a "Stand Your Ground Law". Answer the following questions in writing, "Do you believe it is a good law in general?" "Does it make you feel more or less safe?"
3. *Bonus: Come up with five creative non-violent ways to protest or support the verdict that was delivered.

Trayvon Martin Questions and Lesson Activities for High School

Materials: Blank glossary and warm up questions sheet, Glossary key sheet

Warm Up Questions

4. What is your definition of justice? Give an example of a time when justice was either served or not served in your own life or the life of someone you know.
5. Should a person be able to defend him or herself if he or she is in danger of being hurt or even killed? Should he or she be able to use any weapon (including guns) to keep him or herself safe?
6. Do you feel that people of different races are treated equally in today's society? Give an example when you have experienced or seen unequal treatment.

Class Activity (45 minutes)

1. Give students a blank page of the terms in the glossary and in partners have them write down definitions to see what they already know.
2. Have students complete warm up questions (on back of blank glossary page)
3. In small groups have students share their answers with each other.
4. Read the article (either individually or as a class), and watch any video components, keeping in mind the warm up questions as a guide or perspective to process the story.
5. After reading the blog have students create a timeline of the story in pairs, then share out to create a class timeline of the key events that took place in the story from the day of the shooting, when George Zimmerman was charged, when the trial began, and when the trial ended.
6. Ask the class to consider Florida's "Stand Your Ground Law" which allows people to defend themselves with deadly force as long as they "responsibly believe" it is necessary to protect themselves. Is this a fair law?

Choose from the activities listed below that best fits the needs of your class:

1. Written assignment- **You be the lawyer!**

Individually have students prepare a paper/case as though they were presenting their argument to a jury who will be deciding whether George Zimmerman is guilty of second degree murder or is innocent. You choose whether to be the defense or the prosecution. Make sure to include “opening remarks”- an introduction to the case making sure to define key words, and contextualize the story. Then write one paragraph for each key argument citing evidence from the text, video and timeline. Conclude your paper as though you were making your final case to the jury.

2. Speaking and Listening assignment- Four Corners

1. Ask the students to think about whether the case should have been tried as second degree murder, or voluntary manslaughter (review definitions if needed). Have students go to the four different corners of the classroom based on:

- If they feel that George Zimmerman was guilty of second degree murder
- If they feel that George Zimmerman was not guilty of second degree murder
- If they feel that George Zimmerman was guilty of voluntary man slaughter
- If they feel that George Zimmerman was not guilty of voluntary manslaughter

2. Have students put their ideas together and present to the rest of the class:

- Why they believe the case should have been tried for either second degree murder or manslaughter.
- Why they believe the verdict should be guilty or not guilty supporting their case with three key arguments citing evidence from the text, video and timeline.

3. Take turns and allow students to move from different side of the room after students present their side.

4. Have students return to their seats and as a class de-brief about their experience during the activity. Did you agree with the actually case’s decision to try George Zimmerman for second degree murder? Was anything said that changed their mind, or made them feel less sure about the side they were on during the presentations of the four corners?

Homework:

1. The not guilty verdict and acquittal of all charges against George Zimmerman has angered many people because they feel that justice was not served because Trayvon Martin was an African American teenager. Do you believe that race played a role in the jury's judgment? What does this demonstrate about our country's ability to provide justice for all? Discuss these questions with two people you know.
2. Find out if your state has a "Stand Your Ground Law". Answer the following questions in writing, "Do you believe it is a good law in general?" "Does it make you feel more or less safe?"

*Bonus: Come up with five creative non-violent ways to protest or support the verdict that was delivered.

Extension Activity

Have students write a 300-500 word essay on this topic providing clear examples. Send your completed editorial to NewsHour Extra (extra@newshour.org). Exceptional essays might be published on our Web site.

GLOSSARY

1. justice
2. criminal law
3. criminal trial
4. prosecution
5. defense
6. jury
7. first degree murder
8. second degree murder
9. voluntary manslaughter
10. involuntary manslaughter
11. verdict
12. acquittal
13. guilty
14. "Stand your Ground" Law
15. racial profiling
16. civil law

GLOSSARY KEY

1. justice - a principle of fair and equal treatment for all.
2. criminal law - the body of laws dealing with crimes and their punishments.
3. criminal trial - the legal process for judging claims that someone has committed a crime.
4. prosecution- the side in a trial responsible for presenting the case against an individual suspected of breaking the law. They are trying to prove the accused person is guilty.
5. defense- the side in the case that tries to prove the person accused of the crime is not guilty.
6. jury - the group of people who listen to the case, and decide whether the accused is guilty or not guilty
7. first degree murder - is any murder that is planned in advance.
8. second degree murder - is a murder that is not premeditated or planned in advance.
9. voluntary manslaughter - sometimes called a "Heat of Passion" murder, is any intentional killing was not planned in advance and which was committed under such circumstances that would "cause a reasonable person to become emotionally or mentally disturbed. For example, if someone discovered their wife was cheating on them and killed the wife's lover.
10. involuntary manslaughter - is death with a lack of intention to cause death but involving an intentional, or negligent, act leading to death. A drunk driving-related death is typically involuntary manslaughter.
11. verdict - the formal answer from the jury that is either "guilty" or "not guilty".
12. acquittal - when the charges against the accused are dropped.
13. guilty- when the jury decides, based on facts from the trial, that the accused committed the crime they were charged with.
14. "Stand your Ground" Law- Law which allows people to defend themselves with deadly force as long as they "responsibly believe" it is necessary to protect themselves.
15. racial profiling- the use of an individual's race or ethnicity by law enforcement personnel as a key factor in deciding whether to engage in enforcement (e.g. make a traffic stop or arrest). The practice is controversial and widely considered inappropriate and illegal.

16. civil suit- The difference between a civil suit and a criminal case is mainly one of punishment. Crimes are acts against the state, and are therefore punishable by jail time. In a civil suit, private parties such as individuals or organizations sue for losses and most often for money.

*Definitions were taken from the free dictionary and Wikipedia.