



**National
Urban League**

To Be Equal #24

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Trial to Secure Justice for Trayvon Martin Begins

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"I believe that's Trayvon Martin, that's my baby's voice. Every mother knows their child, and that's his voice." Sybrina Fulton, mother of Trayvon Martin

On Monday of this week, the trial of George Zimmerman, charged in the second-degree murder of Trayvon Martin, finally got underway. The surface facts of the case are not in dispute. On February 26, 2012, Zimmerman, in his role as a neighborhood watch volunteer, followed, shot and killed the unarmed 17-year-old Martin who was walking back to a home in a Sanford, Florida gated community after buying a bag of skittles and a bottle of ice tea from a nearby convenience store. Everything else about this case is complicated by the issues of race, the unsuccessful attempt by Zimmerman's defense to put Trayvon's background on trial and Zimmerman's claim of self-defense that is rooted in Florida's questionable Stand-Your-Ground law. Widespread public attention generated by the case will also likely complicate and prolong the selection of an impartial jury.

As of this writing, Judge Debra Nelson has yet to rule on whether testimony from voice analysis experts can be used to argue whose voice – Trayvon's or Zimmerman's -- is heard screaming for help just before the sound of a gunshot on a taped 911 call. This is a crucial point that could buttress Zimmerman's claim of self-defense or the prosecution's contention that Zimmerman was the aggressor. It should be noted that Trayvon's mother, Sybrina Fulton, has heard the tape and has no doubt that the screaming voice is that of her son. As a lawyer, I appreciate the role of experts in trials, but as a parent, I agree with Sybrina Fulton that in this case there is no more reliable expert than the mother of the victim.

Prior to the start of the trial, Judge Nelson ruled against the defense's attempt to introduce as evidence, Trayvon's school records, past history of fighting or photos and text messages on his cell phone. The judge rightfully decided that none of this has anything to do with why Zimmerman shot Trayvon.

It should also be noted that Zimmerman, a white Hispanic, was a particularly zealous neighborhood watch volunteer. In the months leading up to that fateful February day, he

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had made dozens of 911 calls. In a number of those calls, he reported spotting “suspicious” persons in the neighborhood, almost all of whom were black. In his confrontation with Trayvon Martin, not only did Zimmerman disregard the police dispatcher’s order not to follow the so-called suspicious person, he violated local neighborhood watch rules against carrying a weapon and making pursuit.

We will leave it up to a jury to decide whether George Zimmerman is guilty of second-degree murder in the killing of Trayvon Martin. But, as champions of civil rights and equal justice under the law, we believe this case will shed needed light on the issues of racial profiling and the stereotyping of young black males. We also join Trayvon’s parents, Sybrina Fulton and Tracy Martin, in calling for a repeal of Florida’s troubling Stand Your Ground law which states that anyone in fear of his or her life could be justified in using lethal force against a potential or perceived attacker. We will be closely following the case and will keep you abreast of developments.

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