



**National
Urban League**

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Justice for Jordan: What the Dunn Verdict Says About Our Culture – and the Value that We Place on Young Black Males in America

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“Jordan had no guns. He had no drugs. There was no alcohol. They were coming from the mall. They were being kids.” Lucia McBath, mother of Jordan Davis

Another mother’s anguish. Another unarmed Black teenager in Florida shot dead for no good reason. Another indefensible instance of Stand Your Ground rearing its ugly head. Eight months after the stunning acquittal of George Zimmerman for the shooting death of Trayvon Martin, justice again has been compromised in the fatal shooting of 17-year-old Jordan Davis.

On November 23, 2012, Michael Dunn, a 47-year-old white man, fired ten rounds into a parked SUV after arguing over loud rap music coming from the vehicle with Jordan and three other unarmed African American teenagers inside. Jordan Davis was killed at the scene. Like George Zimmerman, Michael Dunn claimed self-defense and used Florida’s “Stand Your Ground” law to bolster his justification of the killing, as his lawyer stated in his closing argument, “His honor will further tell you that if Michael Dunn was in a public place where he had a legal right to be, he had no duty to retreat and had the right to stand his ground and meet force with force, including deadly force.” Dunn claims Jordan Davis brandished a gun so Dunn shot first. But there is one big problem with his story. Jordan Davis had no gun and neither did anyone else in the SUV.

On Saturday night, a jury found Dunn guilty of four counts, including three for the attempted murders of Jordan’s three friends. But they deadlocked on the fifth count – first-degree murder in the killing of Jordan. Dunn may spend the rest of his life in prison for the four lesser counts. But the failure to convict him of murdering Jordan Davis raises critical questions about the devaluing of the lives of young Black males in America and confirms the need for a repeal of Florida’s repugnant Stand Your Ground law which sanctions the use of deadly force by anyone who merely thinks – or claims – they are in danger from a perceived assailant. Regardless of whether Dunn or Zimmerman chose to fully exercise Stand Your Ground provisions in their defense, this law was very clearly at the center of both cases. It is

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even clearer that the “shoot first” laws across the country are contributing to needless bloodshed and are ripe for unequal [application](#) based on race.

A recent Urban Institute analysis found that in Stand Your Ground states, “When the shooter is white and the victim is black, the justifiable homicide rate is 34 percent. When the situation is reversed and the shooter is black and the victim is white, shootings are ruled to be justifiable in only slightly more than 3 percent of cases.” Last September, the National Urban League, in collaboration with the bipartisan Mayors Against Illegal Guns coalition and VoteVets, issued a report showing that in the 22 states with "Stand Your Ground" laws, the justifiable homicide rate has risen by an average of 53 percent in the five years following their passage. In Florida, justifiable homicides have increased by 200 percent since the law took effect in 2005.

These statistics and their underlying racial disparities, tell us that expansive self-defense laws such as Stand Your Ground are doing more harm than good, and when coupled with implicit racial bias and unfounded preconceptions, young Black males are especially at risk. Dunn's own bigoted words in letters from [jail](#) clearly show his disregard for their lives, as he wrote: “The jail is full of blacks and they all act like thugs. This may sound a bit radical but if more people would arm themselves and kill these (expletive) idiots when they're threatening you, eventually they may take the hint and change their behavior.” and “The fear is that we may get a predominantly black jury and therefore, unlikely to get a favorable verdict. Sad, but that's where this country is still at. The good news is that the surrounding counties are predominantly white and republican and supporters of gun rights!” This view and those like it are why we must commit today to action against the devaluing of our young Black lives.

Even as the Michael Dunn trial was getting underway, we learned that Trayvon Martin's killer, George Zimmerman, had planned to capitalize on the death of a young Black male by participating in a “celebrity” boxing match – when his only claim to fame is killing an unarmed Black teenager – and getting off. Such a blatant disregard for the value of a Black male's life should be a wake-up call to all Americans. We must intensify our fight against Stand Your Ground laws – and the underlying mentality – that justify the killing of young Black men whose only “offense” is being Black.

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