



THE ASSOCIATION OF BLACK PSYCHOLOGISTS

The Association of Black Psychologists calls on all law enforcement agencies to act swiftly and thoroughly to resolve the murder of Trayvon Martin and to bring justice for his grieving family.



According to reports, on February 26, 2012, a 17 year-old Black male, Trayvon Martin, was returning from a local convenience store in Sanford, Florida when he was shot and killed by George Zimmerman. Zimmerman, a 28 year-old White man of Hispanic heritage, is a neighborhood watch volunteer who told police officers that he shot Martin in self-defense. Martin was carrying a bag of Skittles and iced tea, yet Zimmerman claims to have felt that he was in danger. Zimmerman called 911 to report a young Black male acting “suspiciously;” but when told by the dispatcher not to pursue, Zimmerman responded by saying, “They always get away,” and continued to pursue Martin. Zimmerman has not been arrested, in spite of what appears to be a dubious and implausible claim of self-defense. After weeks of uproar and protests, the FBI and the Justice Department have finally decided to open an investigation into Martin’s shooting.

The murder of Trayvon Martin is just the latest tragedy in this country’s history of killing unarmed Black men. Joetavious Stafford was killed by police under questionable conditions at a MARTA station in Atlanta in October 2011. In 2009 Oscar Grant was shot in the back and killed while lying on the floor at a BART station in Oakland, California. In 2005 Henry Glover, a resident of New Orleans, was shot and killed by a police officer. His body was later burned to hide evidence. In one of the most infamous cases, Amadou Diallo was shot and killed in 1999 by New York City police officers who claimed that they believed he was reaching for a gun. These officers were later acquitted. These and countless other cases illustrate the lack of value associated with Black lives in this country and the perilous environment that African Americans must negotiate every day.



For over 40 years the Association of Black Psychologists has been dedicated to influencing and affecting social change, and providing assistance in solving the problems in Black communities. As an organization we are committed to using psychology to improve the lives of people of African ancestry. There is no more urgent social issue to be addressed than racism--institutional, cultural, structural, and individual. As professional psychologists, we especially understand the devastating psychological impact that racism and discrimination have on people of African ancestry. We see the insidious effects of racism and discrimination every day in our clinical practices, in the school systems, in the health and mental health care systems, in the injustices and disproportionate impact of policies and practices in the adult and juvenile justice systems, in the workplace, and everywhere Black people live.

Psychological research has demonstrated that an implicit racial bias often contributes to the 'accidental' shooting of Blacks by police officers. Psychologists have found that individuals are more likely to mistakenly identify objects such as flashlights or cameras as guns when they are held by Blacks in contrast to Whites (Greenwald, Oakes, & Hoffman, 2003). Of course in this instance, Zimmerman was not a police officer and the shooting was not accidental. Nevertheless, we are aware that the stereotype of Black men as dangerous is pervasive and often unconscious and automatic. For this reason, the research supported and promoted by The Association of Black Psychologists is vitally important and critical for Black people. It has been the research conducted by Black psychologists that has emphasized the importance of racial socialization for the survival of young Black boys and called attention to the devastating effects of racial myths and stereotypes on the well-being of African Americans. The sad reality is that we live in a society where young Black males have to be socialized to appear nonthreatening or risk being identified as "suspicious" or "dangerous." Too often they are victimized by "misrecognition" and pay with their lives (Harris-Perry, 2011).

The Association of Black Psychologists is committed to addressing and fighting the insidious effects of racism. We will not allow the death of Trayvon Martin to be in vain. His murder is a sober reminder of the need, once again, to fight for the value of Black life in a country where unarmed Black men and women can be murdered with impunity.

References

- Greenwald, A. G., Oakes, M. A., & Hoffman, H. G. (2003). Targets of discrimination: Effects of race on responses to weapons holders. *Journal Of Experimental Social Psychology*, 39(4), 399-405
- Harris-Perry, M.V. (2011). *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America*. New Haven: Yale University Press.