

The Association of Black Psychologists Response to the George Zimmerman Verdict

On July 13, 2013, a Florida jury delivered a not guilty verdict in the State of Florida versus George Zimmerman case, acquitting Mr. Zimmerman of the second degree murder of Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old Black male child. The decision was received and understood by many Black Americans as nothing short of exoneration due to jury nullification. For example, Juror B37's recent interview with CNN's anchor Anderson Cooper was as stunning in its candor as it was in its grounding in racist anti-logic.

George Zimmerman's acquittal should not be interpreted as a fair finding of innocence for a man who senselessly murdered Trayvon Martin. Rather, it is an affirmation of a kind of jurisprudence that harkens back to the Dred Scott decision of 1857, in which Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger B. Taney wrote, "... a Black man has no rights a white man is bound to respect." This decision should further serve as yet another example to Blacks that their lives are undervalued and endangered.

As other commentators have noted, the outcome of the trial suggests that the judicial system failed Trayvon Martin. However, the truth of those acknowledgements is not a new revelation for Blacks. The psychic reverberations of the Trayvon Martin case has similar vibrations to the historic and highly controversial case of Emmett Till – a fourteen-year-old Black male child brutally killed by Whites in the South in the 1950's. Indeed it seems that there is still no justice for Blacks in America.

Further, as psychologists and healers, we understand the impact of the case on a different level. We recognize that George Zimmerman is a symbol of psychology of oppression. The main purpose of psychology of oppression is for an individual or group to adjust to social oppression by curtailing and distorting one's understanding of social reality so they will not recognize its oppressive character. We further understand that everything that distracts from a rational, objective comprehension of social reality obfuscates oppression and allows it to flourish undetected. We see the evidence of a man who internalized beliefs about Black children that surfaced when confronted with an opportunity to hunt and kill a Black child. We also see microaggressions, the chief vehicle for pracist behaviors, in full action amongst the jurors. Microaggressions are subtle, stunning, often automatic and non-verbal exchanges that have been shown to contribute to unfairness in the legal system by influencing the decisions of juries. What is most concerning is how psychology of oppression and microaggressions impact the self-esteem, self-image and psyche of Blacks in America by reinforcing that our lives are less valuable than other races.

Though justice for Trayvon Martin was not served through the criminal justice process, ABPsi stands with a host of other organizations, most notably the NAACP, in demanding justice through civil rights channels. In so doing, the Association is issuing a call to its members and to others to act now and to join their voices in signing a petition to urge Eric Holder, the United States Attorney General, and the Department of Justice to file civil rights charges against George Zimmerman for violating Trayvon Martin's civil rights. In this manner, some form of justice can be reached for Trayvon Martin and the slow path towards healing can begin for Blacks in America.

Prepared by GA Public Policy Committee Members:
Adisa Ajamu, Dr. Le Ondra Clark Harvey and Dr. Donald Knight