

Directions:

1. Mark your confusion.
2. Show evidence of a close reading. Mark up the text with questions and/or comments.
3. Write a one-page reflection on your own sheet of paper.

The Trayvon Martin Killing

Sources: *The Week* and ABCnews.go.com

On Feb. 26, self-appointed neighborhood watchman George Zimmerman shot 17-year-old Trayvon Martin dead in Sanford, Fla. Martin, who is black, was walking from 7-Eleven to his father's fiancée's home in the Orlando-area gated community, carrying a pack of Skittles, a can of iced tea, and his cellphone. According to 911 tapes reluctantly released by Sanford police on March 16, Zimmerman told police dispatchers he was concerned about a "real suspicious guy," a "black male" walking around the neighborhood. "These assholes always get away," he added, before chasing after Martin, despite the dispatcher telling him not to. A scuffle of some kind ensued, followed by screaming and a gunshot. Late March 19, following a days-long outcry, Florida state law enforcement and the FBI said they would open investigations.

A phone call from slain black teenager Trayvon Martin to his girlfriend seconds before he was shot dead by a self-appointed neighborhood watch captain "blows ... out of the water" the shooter's self-defense claim and he should be arrested "right now," a lawyer for Martin's family said today.

Attorney Benjamin Crump spoke after ABC News reported exclusively the existence of a phone call between Martin and his girlfriend, which detailed the last terrifying moments of Martin's life as he was pursued, accosted and shot dead by George Zimmerman.

Police accepted Zimmerman's claim of self-defense and have charged him with no crime.

"This young lady connects the dots," said Crump. "Arrest George Zimmerman for the killing of Trayvon Martin in cold blood, today. We don't understand how he's not arrested. The family worries that the more time passes it will be swept under the rug."

Martin's death Feb. 26 has stirred national outrage and protests, partly prompting the U.S. Justice Department's Civil Rights Division and the FBI to open an investigation into the case.

Florida State Attorney Norm Wolfinger announced today that he had ordered an "expeditious review" of the investigation conducted by the Sanford Police Department, and that he would be "utilizing the investigative resources of the Seminole County Grand Jury, which will be called to session" next month.

ABC News was there exclusively as the 16-year-old girl told Crump about the last moments of the teenager's life. Martin had been talking to his girlfriend all the way to the store where he bought Skittles and a tea. The phone was in his pocket and the earphone in his ear, Crump said.

"He said this man was watching him, so he put his hoodie on. He said he lost the man," Martin's friend said. "I asked Trayvon to run, and he said he was going to walk fast. I told him to run, but he said he was not going to run."

Eventually, he would run, said the girl, thinking that he'd managed to escape. But suddenly the strange man was back, cornering Martin.

"Trayvon said, 'What are you following me for,' and the man said, 'What are you doing here.' Next thing I hear is somebody pushing, and somebody pushed Trayvon because the headset just fell. I called him again, and he didn't answer the phone."

The line went dead. Besides screams heard on 911 calls that night as Martin and Zimmerman scuffled, those were the last words he said.

Trayvon's phone logs, also obtained exclusively by ABC News, show the conversation occurred five minutes before police first arrived on the scene. Crump said the girl's identity was being withheld because "her parents are gravely concerned about her health and her safety." Her parents asked that only an attorney be allowed to ask her questions.

Martin's father, Tracey Martin, and mother, Sybrina Fulton, listened to the call, along with ABC News, ashen-faced.

"He knew he was being followed and tried to get away from the guy, and the guy still caught up with him," Tracey Martin said. "And that's the most disturbing part. He thought he had got away from the guy, and the guy backtracked for him."

The girl was so distraught after the killing that she spent a night in the hospital, the lawyer said. "She was really traumatized over this. They were dating. ... It's a situation where to know you were the last person to talk to the young man who was one of the most special persons in the world to you," Crump said.

The lawyer said he would give the details of the phone call to the federal investigation. "We're going to turn this over to the Justice Department because the family does not trust the Sanford Police Department to have anything to do with the investigation," said Crump.

Zimmerman killed Martin as Martin walked back to his father's fiance's home after stepping out to buy snacks during the NBA All-Star Game. After weeks of relentless pressure, the Sanford Police Department at last released emergency and nonemergency calls placed during the attack.

"These assholes always get away," Zimmerman said in a call to a nonemergency number.

Dispatcher: "Are you following him?"

Zimmerman: "Yeah."

Dispatcher: "We don't need you to do that."

An altercation soon ensued. A few moments later a torrent of 911 calls flooded in and Martin was killed by a single bullet. Zimmerman claimed self-defense and has yet to be arrested, stoking outrage and claims of prejudice against the police department.

"When George Zimmerman is arrested, tried and convicted I will get a little rest," Tracey Martin said.

But so far, Zimmerman, who is half Latino, has not been arrested or charged for killing an unarmed youth. Why? Here, three theories:

1. Florida's "Shoot First" gun law makes prosecution futile

Zimmerman says he acted in self-defense, which is "barely plausible" — but enough for him to avoid arrest under Florida's path-blazing "Stand Your Ground" gun law, says Emily Bazelon at *Slate*. The 2005 law allows permitted gun owners like Zimmerman to use lethal force on anybody, in any public space, if they reasonably believe it will "prevent imminent death or great bodily harm." Courts say the burden is on prosecutors to prove that the shooter was not acting in self-defense, so "some Orlando-area police agencies simply stopped investigating shootings involving self-defense claims," says Henry Pierson Curtis in the *Orlando Sentinel*. "In case after case during the past six years, Floridians who shot and killed unarmed opponents have not been prosecuted."

2. The local cops were negligent and sloppy

Blame "the slipshod manner in which the Sanford police conducted this investigation," treating the killing of an unarmed child with "the lax scrutiny generally reserved for a broken tail-light," says Ta-Nehisi Coates at *The Atlantic*. The police either lied or didn't know about Zimmerman's past run-in with the law, evident vigilanteism, and 46 calls to 911 since Jan. 1, says Adam Weinstein at *Mother Jones*. Then there's a witness' allegation that a Stanford cop told her to change her story to hearing Zimmerman — not Martin — call for help, Martin's mysteriously vanished cellphone, the police's inexplicable failure to test Zimmerman for drugs or alcohol, and the police department's troubling history of not prosecuting attacks on black people. No wonder the feds are stepping in.

3. Martin was black and Zimmerman isn't

"Activists have gravitated towards racism as the prime motive for the shooting," and it's hard to disagree, says Chauncey DeVega at *Salon*. And "common sense renders a clear judgment here: If a black man shot and killed a white kid for holding a bag of Skittles he would already be [in] jail." And remember, this wouldn't be a national story if the shooter were black, says Kathleen McKinley in the *Houston Chronicle*. "Where is the outrage for the young black males who are killed every day in this country?" Is their death less tragic "because other black males are killing them?"

Nearly half a million people have signed an online petition on change.org urging law enforcement officials to step in and arrest Zimmerman, who violated major parts of the Neighborhood Watch Manual, which states "It should be emphasized to members that they do not possess police powers. And they shall not carry weapons or pursue vehicles."

Possible WN topics

- Do you support Florida's "Stand Your Ground" law? Why? Why not?
- Young men are shot every day in this country. Why do you think this story caught the attention of the national media? Explain.
- Predict what will happen next in this case. Explain your prediction.