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OPINION | OUR VIEW

Zimmerman Trial: Verdict Vs. Outcome

Like it or not — and there are clearly plenty of people in the country who don't — the Florida jury in the George Zimmerman murder trial made the right decision. In fact, it was arguably the only decision these six people could have made.

Taking the high grade of emotion out of the situation, the case to convict Zimmerman on second-degree murder (instead of manslaughter) for the shooting death of Trayvon Martin last year was a clumsy overreach by prosecutors. Many legal scholars, who were unsurprised by the controversial verdict, say it was next to impossible to prove the charges and make the case for murder. With the prosecution unable to connect the dots, reasonable doubt prevailed, especially given the broad nature of Florida's self-defense laws.

One could argue that emotion — especially one based on racial hot buttons — derailed this entire process.

"... This case was brought because of a political outcry," said Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz. "This case should never have been brought."

So, the verdict was the correct one.

And yet, this was not a good outcome.

The fact remains that there was a confrontation between an armed man and an unarmed teen-ager. The armed man killed the unarmed teen and, by claiming self-defense, gets to walk.

Despite the verdict, something isn't quite right with that picture.

There were the myriad details of the case. Zimmerman was clearly injured in the encounter, and one witness said it appeared Martin was on top of him landing punches. Then again, it also a fact that Zimmerman, the head of a Neighborhood Watch group in a gated community dealing with crime issues, contacted police about the young, black suspect and was told not to engage him. He did so anyway. We have only one side of the account that could tell us who started the problem; the other side of the account is dead and buried. We are left, then, with assumptions and emotional hunches. We are left, then, with reasonable doubts.

If Zimmerman is not guilty, does that mean Martin WAS guilty? And if so, of what? This is where the picture is stubbornly incomplete — and where the racial raw nerves, amplified by the incessant television coverage, twitch and squirm. Was Martin guilty of becoming belligerent with a stranger who challenged him? If Martin was fighting back against someone with a gun — someone who could "stand his ground" (although that controversial Florida law was technically waived by the defense in this case, mostly because that state's aforementioned self-defense laws offer a latitude of "aggressive defense") in uncertain, subjective circumstances — could Martin be blamed for that response? Or was it, as some charge, a matter of racial profiling?

If Zimmerman isn't guilty but Martin isn't guilty either, then what has transpired here? What has been the net result of this tragic interaction? Where does the wisdom of reasonable doubt fall in this scenario?

These are hard questions that may never be answered. Perhaps they represent a triumph for our notions of self-defense and security, or perhaps that point to an awful gray area in those notions.

Ultimately, nothing has been won here. Nothing has been gained, except the twisting burden of more questions, more anger, more uncertainty and greater distrust. The jury did its job, but the work is clearly far from over.

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THE VIEWS PAGE

■ The **PRESS & DAKOTAN** Views page provides a forum for open discussion of issues and interests affecting our readers. Initialed editorials represent the opinion of the writer, but not necessarily that of the **PRESS & DAKOTAN**. Bylined columns represent the view of the author. We welcome letters to the editor on current topics. Questions regarding the Views page should be directed to Kelly Hertz at views@yankton.net.

ON THIS DATE

By The Associated Press

Today is Wednesday, July 17, the 198th day of 2013. There are 167 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On July 17, 1918, Russia's Czar Nicholas II and his family were executed by the Bolsheviks.

On this date: In 1763, American entrepreneur John Jacob Astor was born in Walldorf in present-day Germany.

In 1821, Spain ceded Florida to the United States.

In 1862, during the Civil War, Congress approved the Second Confiscation Act, which declared that all slaves taking refuge behind Union lines were to be set free.

In 1936, the Spanish Civil War began as right-wing army generals launched a coup attempt against the Second Spanish Republic.

In 1938, aviator Douglas Corrigan took off from New York, saying he was headed for California; he ended up in Ireland, supposedly by accident, earning the nickname "Wrong Way Corrigan."

In 1944, during World War II, 320 men, two-thirds of them African-Americans, were killed when a pair of ammunition ships exploded at the Port Chicago Naval Magazine in California.

In 1955, Disneyland had its opening day in Anaheim, Calif.

In 1962, the United States conducted its last atmospheric nuclear test to date, detonating a 20-kiloton device, code-named Little Feller I, at the Nevada Test Site.

In 1975, an Apollo spaceship docked with a Soyuz spacecraft in orbit in the first superpower link-up of its kind.

In 1981, 114 people were killed when a pair of suspended walkways above the lobby of the Kansas City Hyatt Regency Hotel collapsed during a tea dance.

In 1996, TWA Flight 800, a Europe-bound Boeing 747, exploded and crashed off Long Island, N.Y., shortly after leaving John F. Kennedy International Airport, killing all 230 people aboard.

In 1998, Nicholas II, last of the Romanov czars, was formally buried in Russia 80 years after he and his family were slain by the Bolsheviks.

Ten years ago: President George W. Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair forcefully defended their decision to topple Saddam Hussein during a joint White House news conference. In a speech to the U.S. Congress, Blair said even if they were proven wrong about Iraq's weapons

capabilities, "We will have destroyed a threat that at its least is responsible for inhuman carnage and suffering." Democrats Joe Lieberman, Dick Gephardt and Dennis Kucinich apologized to the NAACP for bypassing a presidential forum.

Five years ago: The FDA lifted its salmonella warning on tomatoes amid signs the record outbreak, while not over, might finally be slowing. President George W. Bush and Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki held a secure video conference during which they agreed to set a "general time horizon" for bringing more U.S. troops home from the Iraq war.

One year ago: Testifying before the Senate Banking Committee, Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke painted a dark picture of where the U.S. economy was headed if Congress failed to reach agreement soon to avert a budget crisis. Israel plunged toward a political crisis after the largest party in the government quit, leaving Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in charge of a hard-line coalition opposed to most Mideast peace moves. Basketball sensation Jeremy Lin returned to Houston after the New York Knicks decided they wouldn't match the Rockets' three-year, \$25 million offer for the restricted free agent.

Today's Birthdays: Jazz singer Jimmy Scott is 88. Actor Donald Sutherland is 78. Actress-singer Dianna Carroll is 78. Comedian Tim Brooke-Taylor is 73. Rock musician Spencer Davis is 71. Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall, is 66. Rock musician Terry "Geezer" Butler is 64. Actress Lucie Arnaz is 62. Actor David Hasselhoff is 61. Rock musician Fran Smith Jr. (The Hooters) is 61. Television producer Mark Burnett ("Survivor," "The Apprentice") is 53. Actress Nancy Giles is 53. Singer Regina Belle is 50. Country singer Craig Morgan is 49. Rock musician Lou Barlow is 47. Contemporary Christian singer Susan Ashton is 46. Actor Andre Royo is 45. Actress Bitty Schram is 45. Actor Jason Clarke is 44. Singer JC (PM Dawn) is 42. Rapper Sole is 40. Country singer Luke Bryan is 37. Actor Eric Winter is 37. Hockey player Marc Savard is 36. Actor Mike Vogel is 34. Actor Tom Cullen (TV: "Downton Abbey") is 28. Actor Brando Eaton is 27. Rhythm-and-blues singer Jeremih is 26. Actress Summer Bishil is 25.

Thought for Today: "Sometimes it's worse to win a fight than to lose." — Billie Holiday, American jazz singer (born 1915, died this date in 1959).

FROM THE BIBLE

Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works. *Hebrews 10:24*. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis



Four Words Of Advice

BY LEONARD PITTS JR.

Tribune Media Services

Four words of advice for African-Americans in the wake of George Zimmerman's acquittal: Wake the hell up.

The Sunday after Zimmerman went free was a day of protest for many of us. From Biscayne Boulevard in Miami to Leimert Park in Los Angeles, to the Daley Center in Chicago to Times Square in New York City, African-Americans — and others who believe in racial justice — carried out angry, but mostly peaceful demonstrations.

Good. This is as it should have been.

But if that's the end, if you just get it out of your system, then move ahead with business as usual, then all you did Sunday was waste your time. You might as well have stayed home.

We are living in a perilous era for African-American freedom. The parallels to other eras have become too stark to ignore.

Every period of African-American advance has always been met by a crushing period of push back, the crafting of laws and the use of violence with the intent of eroding the new freedoms. Look it up:

The 13th Amendment ended slavery. So the white South created a convict leasing system that was actually harsher.

The 14th Amendment guaranteed citizenship. So the white South rendered that citizenship meaningless with the imposition of Jim Crow laws.

The 15th Amendment gave us the right to vote; it was taken away by the so-called "grandfather clause." The Supreme Court struck that down, so the white South relied on literacy tests and poll taxes to snatch our ballots all over again.

Our history is a litany: two steps forward, one step back.

The Civil Rights Movement was the greatest step forward since emancipation. So we ought not be surprised to see voting rights eroded again, the Civil Rights Act attacked, the so-called "War on Drugs" used for the mass incarceration of black men. Or to see the killing of an unarmed child deliver a message as old as the Constitution itself: Black life is worth less.



Leonard PITTS

We are in another period of push back. And worse, we don't even seem to know.

It feels as if we have taken the great advances of the last half century — the protective laws, the rise of the black middle class, the winning of the ballot, the flowering of options once considered unthinkable — for granted. It feels as if we have come to regard progress as somehow inevitable, preordained, carved in stone and irrevocable as a birthright.

So yes, we need to wake the hell up. While we were celebrating, others were calculating.

While we were writing nasty rap lyrics, they were writing senators.

While we were organizing Obama victory parties, they were organizing tea parties.

While we were buying DVDs, they were buying candidates.

While we were sending texts, they were building propaganda machinery.

While we were resting on the past, they were seizing the future.

Granted, the preceding casts a wide net. Yes, there are many of us, African-Americans and others, who don't need the admonition, who are already awake, who have always been awake. More power to them.

But there are also many of us still sleeping. So let Trayvon Martin's death and the acquittal of his killer be a wake-up call. Let it be a spur to stop reacting and start pro-acting. Let it be a goad to become better informed. Let it be a reminder to organize. Let it be a reason to send a check to the NAACP. Let it be an incentive to join the social justice ministry at church. Let it be cause to write your congressperson. Let it be an impetus to teach and nurture your kids.

Most of all, let it be an alarm clock, ringing in the darkness of a new morning, calling conscience to account. Do not waste this moment. The time for sleeping is done.

Leonard Pitts is a columnist for *The Miami Herald*, 1 Herald Plaza, Miami, Fla., 33132. Readers may contact him via e-mail at lpitts@miamiherald.com.

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Tax Students, Not Polluters?

BY ROBERT B. REICH

Tribune Media Services

A basic economic principle is that government ought to tax what we want to discourage, and not tax what we want to encourage.

For example, if we want less carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, we should tax carbon polluters. On the other hand, if we want more students from lower-income families to be able to afford college, we should not put a tax on student loans.

Sounds pretty simple, doesn't it? Unfortunately, congressional Republicans seem intent on doing exactly the opposite.

Earlier this year the Republican-led House passed a bill pegging student-loan interest rates to the yield on the 10-year Treasury note, plus 2.5 percentage points. "I have very little tolerance for people who tell me that they graduate with \$200,000 of debt or even \$80,000 of debt because there's no reason for that," said Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-N.C.), the co-sponsor of the GOP bill.

Republicans estimate this would bring in around \$3.7 billion of extra revenue over a 10-year period, which would help pay down the federal debt.

In other words, it's a tax — and one that hits lower-income students and their families hardest. Which is why several leading Democrats, including Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-Ill.), oppose it. "Let's make sure we don't charge so much in interest that the students are actually paying a tax to reduce the deficit," Durbin argues.

Republicans claim the president's plan is almost the same as their own. Not true. Obama's plan would lead to lower rates, limit repayments to 10 percent of a borrower's discretionary income, and fix the rate for the life of the loan.

Meanwhile, a growing number of Republicans have signed a pledge — sponsored by the multi-billionaire Koch brothers' political organization,



Robert REICH

Americans for Prosperity — to oppose any climate-change legislation that might raise government revenues by taxing polluters.

Officially known as the "No Climate Tax Pledge," its signers promise to "oppose any legislation relating to climate change that includes a net increase in government revenue."

At least 411 current officeholders nationwide have signed on, including the entire GOP House leadership, a third of the members of the House as a whole, and a quarter of U.S. senators.

The New Yorker's Jane Mayer reports that two successive efforts to control greenhouse-gas emissions by implementing cap-and-trade energy bills have died in the Senate, the latter specifically targeted by Americans for Prosperity.

Why are Republicans willing to impose a tax on students and not on polluters? Don't look for high principle.

Big private banks stand to make a bundle on student loans if rates on government loans are raised. They have thrown their money at both parties but have been particularly generous to the GOP. A 2012 report by the nonpartisan Public Campaign shows that since 2000, the student loan industry has spent more than \$50 million on lobbying.

Meanwhile, the Koch brothers — whose Koch Industries ranks among America's worst air polluters, according to *Forbes* Magazine — have long been intent on blocking a carbon tax or a cap-and-trade system, which would cut into their profits. And they, too, have been donating generously to Republicans to do their bidding.

We should be taxing polluters and not taxing students. The GOP has it backwards because its patrons want it that way.

Robert Reich, former U.S. Secretary of Labor, is professor of public policy at the University of California at Berkeley and the author of "Beyond Outrage," now available in paperback. He blogs at www.robertreich.org.

YOUR LETTERS

Honoring Teamwork

Paul Young, Spearfish

President, South Dakota Municipal League (SDML) and City of Spearfish council member

For any organization to be successful, teamwork must be a core commodity.

For a municipality, teamwork is absolutely essential. We all know and appreciate the teamwork between the various departments, the teamwork between elected officials and city staff, and the teamwork between a mayor and council. But from an elected official's standpoint, I would like to single out some unsung players in this whole teamwork scheme. Without them, municipal government would have a hard time functioning at all.

These unsung players are the employers that allow their employees to serve as elected officials. They are willing to share their human resource with the community as a whole, knowing that there will be additional demands placed upon the employee's time and talent. By allowing their employees to serve as an elected official, they not only allow their community to operate today but they

allow the vision and goal to be set for tomorrow.

Every community depends upon people willing to serve in an elected capacity and do the work necessary in the decision-making process that shapes the community. For everyone willing to serve, there must be someone willing to allow that person to serve. So you can see that the teamwork necessary for municipal government to function properly extends beyond the walls of city hall and includes many others outside of government proper. But whether realized or not, they are showing that they care what kind of community they have and want by allowing their employee to be in a decision-making position in their municipal government.

In my 17 years as an elected official, I've been blessed with several employers who have allowed me to serve my community and state. I am humbled and honored by their sacrifice. So here is a big shout out to all the unsung players/employers across this great State of South Dakota! You not only provide us with great jobs but you also allow us the opportunity to serve the greater community as well. Your generosity does not go unnoticed. Thank you!