



## News Media Try Hard to Pin “Racist” Tag on Zimmerman

The nationwide demonstrations that followed Saturday’s “not guilty” verdict in the Sanford, Florida, trial of George Zimmerman featured placards that read, “Zimmerman: The people say guilty.” Never mind the trial, never mind the jury, it’s what “the people” think — or feel — that matters. The zealots of the French Revolution would have handled the case differently, one might imagine, executing the will of “the people” by marching Zimmerman directly to the guillotine. That would likely have been an outcome pleasing as well to America’s young “revolutionaries” of a few decades ago, crying out for “Power to the people!” Sometimes the world still seems stuck in 1968.



The “verdict” of people in the street is one thing. But when someone found not guilty by a jury in a court of law is pronounced guilty by the editorial board of the prestigious *New York Times*, it becomes a little harder to ignore. To be sure, America’s “newspaper of record” did not exactly say in its [Monday morning editorial](#) that Zimmerman was “guilty” of either murder or manslaughter in the shooting death of Trayvon Martin. But the concluding paragraph constitutes, if not a conviction, then at least an indictment of Zimmerman — and his gun.

In the end, what is most frightening is that there are so many people with guns who are like George Zimmerman. Fear and racism may never be fully eliminated by legislative or judicial order, but neither should our laws allow and even facilitate their most deadly expression. Trayvon Martin was an unarmed boy walking home from the convenience store. If only Florida could give him back his life as easily as it is giving back George Zimmerman’s gun.

Perhaps, then, a sliver of a silver lining in the dark cloud over Trayvon Martin’s death may be found in the fact that it has given high-minded editorial writers another opportunity to publish their opposition to “fear and racism.” There was no doubt fear on the part of both parties when Zimmerman and Martin confronted one another on a dark street on the night of the shooting. There is a good deal less certainty about the claim of racism. What is conspicuous is the lack of evidence of it. Surely, if the prosecutors could have uncovered any evidence of racism by Zimmerman, it would have been a part, and a highly publicized part, of the case they presented in court.

Attorney General Eric Holder has confirmed that the U.S. Department of Justice is investigating the possibility of prosecuting Zimmerman for civil rights violations. To do so successfully, the federal lawyers will have to overcome what *Fox News* has politely called “[evidence hurdles](#).” According to a McClatchy news report, the FBI has already interviewed dozens of people for evidence of racial bias on Zimmerman’s part and has come up empty. Sanford police detective Chris Serino told FBI agents last year that he considered Zimmerman as having “a little hero complex, but not as a racist,” *Fox News*



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on July 16, 2013

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reported.

The *Times* is not, of course, the only news medium to try to make the facts of the Zimmerman case fit the preordained conclusion of racism. *USA Today* columnist Rem Rieder has pointed out ways in which major segments of the nation's news media ["got \[the\] Zimmerman case wrong from the start."](#) One example is the editing by NBC News of Martin's "911" call to the police to make it sound as though the neighborhood watch captain's reason for suspecting Martin might be a criminal intruder was because he was black. In fact, he only mentioned the teenager's race when asked about it by the police dispatcher.

Attorney General Holder also [implied](#) a racial motive for the shooting when he spoke of the need to address "underlying attitudes, mistaken beliefs and stereotypes that serve as the basis for these too common incidents." Evidence that Holder has already determined the outcome of the Justice Department's investigation may also be seen in his reference to the "tragic, unnecessary shooting death" of Trayvon Martin. Unnecessary? Zimmerman's lawyers argued it was a case of self-defense and the jury, with its "not guilty" verdict, registered its unanimous agreement. An act of self-defense is, by definition, one that is necessary to defend one's one life and limb.

It is possible, of course, that Holder had in mind the "unnecessary" following of Martin by Zimmerman, leading to the deadly confrontation. But merely following someone is not a crime, a point one of Zimmerman's attorneys wanted to point out to the jury, but was prevented by the judge from doing so.

Finally, there is the rhetorical question, posed by columnists in the *Times* and elsewhere, of how the case might have turned out if the racial roles had been reversed — if the shooter had been a black man and the victim an unarmed white teenager. The argument is that white jurors would in that case have voted to convict the gunman. But sadly, neither black-on-white nor white-on-black killings are rare events in America. Chances are that if Zimmerman had been black and Martin white, most of the nation never would have heard of the shooting. It would have been a local story and one not all that unusual. And there would be no investigation by a federal Department of Justice into the feasibility of charging the shooter with a "hate crime" and a violation of civil rights.

That's another way of looking at the absence of the "equal protection of the laws," guaranteed by the [14th Amendment](#) to the Constitution of the United States.



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