



Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on May 8, 2012

Eric Holder Invokes George Zimmerman Case in Speech to Detroit NAACP

Invoking the death of Trayvon Martin during a speech before the NAACP's Detroit chapter on Sunday, U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder [discussed](#) America's progress in civil rights, but added that the country is still fighting to "overcome injustice" and "eliminate disparities." Using George Zimmerman, Martin's assailant, as a prop for his seemingly campaign-driven speech, Mr. Holder decried the purported rise in crime and violence among young people.



"This (violence) is an issue that has — rightly — garnered significant national attention in recent months, as our nation has struggled to make sense of the tragic shooting death of a Florida teenager named Trayvon Martin," the Attorney General told a crowd of NAACP members. "As this case moves through the legal system, Justice Department officials will continue to communicate closely with state and local authorities to ensure that community concerns are heard, tensions are alleviated, and — as with every investigation at every level — appropriate actions are guided by the facts and the law."

The Justice Department is now investigating the contentious [Florida case](#) to decide whether federal civil rights laws were violated when Zimmerman, a Neighborhood Watch captain, shot the 17-year-old black teenager, which Zimmerman claims was done out of self-defense.

The DOJ's initiative seems to have been prompted by a nationwide controversy that has rallied a slew of civil rights activists, who have censured Florida law enforcement officials for delaying a criminal charge against Zimmerman. Liberal and outspoken civil rights advocate Rev. Al Sharpton, for instance, used the incident as a buttress to profess that racism against African Americans is still an epidemic in America.

"Trayvon Martin committed no crime," Sharpton [said](#) at a press conference last month. "He had no weapon and he had every legal right to be where he was. The rush to judgment was those that moved against him, said he was suspicious, and took his life. So to lecture us about rushing to judgment, we're a victim of a rush to judgment in this case. Let's be real clear on that."

Other prominent advocates, even those from the Obama administration, have exuded similar sentiments. Holder, in particular, has been especially vocal about the incident, calling it a "tragedy that we are all struggling to understand."

"Many of you are greatly — and rightly — concerned about the recent shooting death of Trayvon Martin, a young man whose future has been lost to the ages," Holder [said](#) in April, during the opening ceremonies for Rev. Sharpton's annual National Action Network convention. "If we find evidence of a potential federal criminal civil rights crime, we will take appropriate action, and at every step, the facts and law will guide us forward." Holder's was met with rounds of applause during the convention when he pledged to use the Justice Department to "conduct a thorough and independent review of the evidence."



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“[A]s we all know, the reality is that certain aspects of this case are far from unique,” Holder affirmed in his Sunday dialogue. “And incidents of violence involving young people are anything but rare.”

Holder’s visit to the Detroit NAACP seemed to reflect campaign-like sentiments, as he referred to both he and President Obama as “direct beneficiaries” of the civil rights efforts carried out by the NAACP and other influential advocacy groups. He hailed the Detroit chapter specifically for their valiant efforts in addressing civil rights issues, as they fight to ensure equal voting rights, expand employment opportunities, strengthen the criminal justice system, and promote fairness in immigration and sentencing policies.

Moreover, the Attorney General pointed out that issues of racial discrimination and injustice are still a serious problem: “[D]espite the significant, once-unimaginable advances that have marked the century since this group convened its first meetings... the unfortunate fact is that, in 2012, our nation’s long struggle to overcome injustice, to eliminate disparities, to bridge long-standing divisions, and to eradicate violence has not yet ended.”

Holder proceeded to tout the Obama administration’s “unprecedented commitment” to safeguarding child safety, and specifically, the DOJ’s dedication to achieving racial justice and parity:

Over the past three years, the Department’s Civil Rights Division has filed more criminal civil rights cases than ever before, including record numbers of police misconduct, hate crimes, and human trafficking cases. We’ve moved aggressively to combat continuing racial segregation in schools and to eliminate discriminatory practices in our housing and lending markets.

We’ve taken decisive action to vigorously enforce the 1965 Voting Rights Act, our nation’s most important civil rights statute, by challenging attempts to disenfranchise many of our fellow citizens... Across the administration, we’re working in a range of other innovative ways to achieve fairness and expand opportunity — from successfully advocating for the reduction of the unfair and unjust 100-to-1 sentencing disparity between crack and powder cocaine offenses — to launching a new, Department-wide Diversity Management Initiative.

As the November elections near, and as economic growth remains relatively flat, critics contend that the administration is attempting to deflect fiscal and economic issues by pursuing other avenues to promote the President’s reelection campaign. Naturally, minority voters are a critical segment of the American electorate, and expressing sensitivity toward those groups are veritable measures to promote the Obama campaign.

A growing number of African Americans have grown weary of Obama’s overall performance in the White House. In April 2011, for instance, 83 percent of blacks held a “strongly favorable” view of the President, according to a [Washington Post/ABC News poll](#); in a newer poll, conducted last September, that number fell to 58 percent.

Considering U.S. unemployment still exceeds 8 percent — and significantly higher among the black community — Team Obama is attempting to divert focus away from the economy. Meanwhile, the administration has launched an intensive campaign to court Hispanics with pro-immigration policies, young voters with low-interest student loans, and blacks with a pledge to further advance the civil rights agenda.



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