

The New York Times

Trayvon Martin's Legacy: [Editorial]

[The Editorial Board](#). **New York Times**, Late Edition (East Coast) [New York, N.Y] 15 July 2013: A.16. from ProQuest on August 26, 2013

Full Text

It may not be possible to consider the case of George Zimmerman, who was acquitted Saturday of all charges in the killing of Trayvon Martin, as anything but a sad commentary on the state of race relations and the battle over gun rights in America today.

Certainly it is about race -- ask any black man, up to and including President Obama, and he will tell you at least a few stories that sound eerily like what happened that rainy winter night in Sanford, Fla.

While Mr. Zimmerman's conviction might have provided an emotional catharsis, we would still be a country plagued by racism, which persists in ever more insidious forms despite the Supreme Court's sanguine assessment that "things have changed dramatically," as it said in last month's ruling striking down the heart of the Voting Rights Act. (The Justice Department is right to continue its investigation into whether Mr. Zimmerman may still be prosecuted under federal civil rights laws.)

The jury reached its verdict after having been asked to consider Mr. Zimmerman's actions in light of Florida's now-notorious Stand Your Ground statute. Under that law, versions of which are on the books in two dozen states, a person may use deadly force if he or she "reasonably believes" it is necessary to prevent death or great bodily harm - - a low bar that the prosecutors in this case fought in vain to overcome.

These laws sound intuitive: who would argue that you may not protect yourself against great harm? But of course, the concept of "reasonable belief" is transformed into something deadly dangerous when firearms are involved. And when the Stand Your Ground laws intersect with lax concealed-carry laws, it works essentially to self-deputize anyone with a Kel-Tec 9 millimeter and a grudge.

It has been a bad year so far for gun control. But if anything, cases like this should be as troubling as the mass killings that always prompt a national outcry and promises of legislative remedy. We were heartened that President Obama, in his statement after the verdict was issued, took the opportunity to denounce once again "the tide of gun violence" sweeping the country.

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.