

# Trayvon Martin

**Trayvon Benjamin Martin** (February 5, 1995 – February 26, 2012) was a 17-year-old African American from Miami Gardens, Florida, who was fatally shot by George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch volunteer, in Sanford, Florida. Martin, who was serving a school suspension, had gone with his father on a visit to his father's fiancée at her townhouse at *The Retreat at Twin Lakes* in Sanford. On the evening of February 26, Martin went to a convenience store and purchased candy and a canned drink. As Martin returned from the store, he walked through a neighborhood that had been victimized by robberies several times that year. Zimmerman, a member of the community watch, spotted him and called the Sanford Police to report him for suspicious behavior. Moments later, there was an altercation between the two individuals in which Martin was shot in the chest. Zimmerman, who was injured in the altercation, was not charged at the time of the shooting by the Sanford Police, who said that there was no evidence to refute his claim of self-defense and that Florida's stand your ground law prohibited law-enforcement officials from arresting or charging him. After national media focused on the tragedy, Zimmerman was eventually charged and tried in Martin's death. A jury acquitted Zimmerman of second-degree murder and of manslaughter in July 2013.

Martin was born in Miami, Florida, and attended both Norland Middle School and Highland Oaks Middle School, in north Miami-Dade County, Florida. He attended Miami Carol City High School in Miami Gardens for his freshman and sophomore years, and at the time of the shooting was a junior at Dr. Michael M. Krop High School in north Miami-Dade.

Following Martin's death, rallies, marches and protests were held across the nation. In March 2012, hundreds of students at his high school held a walkout in support of him. An online petition calling for a full investigation and prosecution of Zimmerman garnered 2.2 million signatures. The media coverage surrounding Martin's death was greater than that of the 2012 presidential race, which was underway at the time. A national debate about racial profiling and stand your ground laws ensued, and the governor of Florida appointed a task force to examine the state's self-defense laws. Martin's life was scrutinized by the media and bloggers who examined the digital footprint he had left behind. On social media, the name "Trayvon" was tweeted (mentioned in posts to Twitter web feeds by users of the service) more than two million times in the 30 days following the shooting.<sup>[1][2][3][4][5][6]</sup> More than 1,000 people attended the viewing of his re-

mains the day before his funeral, which was held on March 3, 2012 in Miami, Florida. He was buried in Dade-Memorial Park (North), in Miami. A memorial was dedicated to Martin at the Goldsboro Westside Historical Museum, a black history museum in Sanford in July 2013.<sup>[7][8][9][10][11][12][13]</sup>

## 1 Biography



*Tracy Martin and Sybrina Fulton at an event in 2012*

Martin was born in Miami, Florida, the son of Sybrina Fulton and Tracy Martin, who divorced in 1999. At the time of the shooting, Fulton was a program coordinator for the Miami Dade Housing Authority, and Tracy was a truck driver; they lived near each other in Miami Gardens. Martin's older brother, Jahavaris Fulton, was 21 years old at the time of his brother's death and was enrolled in Florida International University, majoring in information technology. Jahavaris would later serve, in July 2013, as an intern for Representative Frederica Wilson, who represents Florida's 24th district, which includes Miami Gardens, in Congress. Jahvaris was also part of the 5000 Role Models of Excellence Project, which had been founded by Wilson 20 years earlier, a mentoring program that addresses needs and issues facing at-risk boys in Miami-Dade schools.<sup>[12][14][15][16][17]</sup>

After his divorce from Sybrina Fulton, Martin's father married Alicia Stanley who had two daughters from a previous marriage. They met when Martin was about three years old. Stanley and Martin's father were together for about 14 years. Stanley told CNN's Anderson Cooper that before she and Tracy Martin separated, Trayvon was

with her 90% of the time and that she went to all his football games and took care of him when he was sick. She also said that Trayvon was a kind and loving person, not the thug the media made him out to be.<sup>[12][18][19][Note 1]</sup>

When Martin was nine years old, he saved his father's life by pulling his father, who had been immobilized by burns to the legs, out of a fire in their apartment.<sup>[12][20]</sup> Martin enjoyed sports video games.<sup>[21]</sup> He washed cars, babysat and cut grass to earn his own money.<sup>[12][20][21]</sup> Martin's former football coach said Martin had been one of the best players on their football team (The Wolverines) that played at Forzano Park in Miramar, Florida. Martin played for the Wolverines from age 8 to 13, and sometimes sat out because his father benched him "because he messed up in school."<sup>[20]</sup> Martin had played football at the park since he was five years old and his team was coached in part, by his father. During his years in high school, Martin volunteered at Forzano Park, working in the concession stand, sometimes staying until 8 or 9 p.m., before going home. Martin's former football coach said he was a shy kid and always walked with his hoodie and headphones on listening to music.<sup>[21]</sup>

Martin's cousin Stephen Martin, who had been in a park telling jokes with Trayvon the night before his death, said that he and Trayvon had been like brothers growing up. He recalled that Trayvon had been very skilled at assembling, repairing, and riding pocket bikes and dirt bikes. Miriam Martin, Trayvon's aunt and Stephen's mother, said her nephew had often stayed over visiting her family. She also said that Trayvon was fond of wearing a hoodie; "it could be 100 degrees outside and he always had his hoodie on."<sup>[20]</sup>

Martin had wanted to fly or fix planes and in the summer of 2009, enrolled in "Experience Aviation," a seven-week program in Opa-locka, Florida, which introduced him to aviation. During the time Martin was enrolled in the program, it was run by Barrington Irving, the youngest person ever to fly solo around the world. Irving said Martin was a polite youth who enjoyed flying and had an interest in football. After Martin graduated from the program, he spent the next summer as a volunteer, helping out new students in the aviation program. According to his parents, Martin had hoped to attend the University of Miami or Florida A&M University.<sup>[21]</sup>

## 1.1 Martin's latter teenage years

When Martin started high school, his goal of playing professional football was put aside in favor of a career working with airplanes.<sup>[21]</sup> Martin attended Carol City High School in Miami Gardens for his freshman year and most of his sophomore year, before he transferred to Krop High School in north Miami-Dade in 2011. While in his first year at Carol City, Martin attended classes in the mornings at the high school and then went to George T. Baker Aviation School for the rest of his school day. Mar-

tin's ninth grade teacher, who taught him three classes of Aerospace Technology at the Baker Aviation School, said he was a normal student, well-behaved and passed all the classes. According to another teacher at Carol City, math was his favorite subject, and she said she never saw Martin show disrespect. Some students at Carol City, compared Martin's death to that of Emmett Till, one of the nation's most infamous civil rights cases.<sup>[12][20][21]</sup>

Martin's mother had him transferred to Dr. Michael M. Krop High School, having approximately 2,700 students, for his junior year. Fulton said that her son had average performance in school, and she transferred him because she thought Krop High School was a better school and wanted a different environment for him. While a student at Dr. Michael M. Krop High School, Martin had behavioral issues in school. At the time of the shooting, he was serving a ten-day suspension for having a marijuana pipe and an empty bag containing marijuana residue. He had been suspended twice before; for tardiness and truancy and marking up a door with graffiti. The suspension for graffiti was in October 2011, when Martin was observed by a school police officer on a security camera "hiding and being suspicious" in a restricted area of the school. According to the officer, he later observed Martin marking up a door with "W.T.F." When his backpack was searched the next day by a Miami-Dade School Police officer, looking for the graffiti marker, the officer found a dozen pieces of women's jewelry, a watch and a screwdriver that was described by the school police officer as a burglary tool. The jewelry found in his backpack included silver wedding bands and earrings with diamonds. When Martin was asked by the officer if the jewelry belonged to his family or a girlfriend, he said a friend had given it to him. When asked for the name of the friend, Martin declined to provide it. The school police impounded the jewelry and sent photographs of it to detectives at Miami-Dade to investigate it further. No evidence ever surfaced at that time that the jewelry was stolen. An attorney for Martin's family said the parents did not know about the jewelry or screwdriver. Martin was not charged with any crime related to these suspensions and did not have a juvenile record.<sup>[22][23]</sup>

## 1.2 Digital footprint

Martin, known under the nickname "Slimm" on the social media site Twitter, had tweeted (posted to Twitter feeds) thousands of times over a period of months, according to *The Miami Herald*. Martin tweeted his last message two days before he was shot in February 2012.<sup>[Note 2]</sup> According to the *Herald*, Martin's digital footprint portrayed him as a typical 17-year-old teenager with a sense of humor and a preoccupation with girls, and sometimes using profanity when discussing sex in his tweets. Martin also enjoyed making jokes on Twitter about street culture, and posted YouTube excerpts from films like *Friday* and *Next Friday*, which both made fun of street culture.

Martin liked rap and tweeted about Tupac Shakur, DMX and Mystikal, and often quoted explicit song lyrics in his tweets. Martin's postings sometimes reflected a personal nature with references to Krispy Kreme doughnuts, ice cream, movies and all-night study sessions. The *Miami Herald* also reported that Martin was not happy at Krop: in one of his tweets he had written, "WULD I MISS KROP?? HELL NAW FUK DA SKOOL, FUK DA LUNCH, ND MOST OF ALL FUK DA FACULTY..... IMA MISS SUM OF DA STUDENTS, MAINLY DA BABIES ;)"<sup>[4][24][25][Note 3][26]</sup>

Critics of Martin had pointed out his tattoos, an empty marijuana bag, a photo of Martin with gold grills (a kind of dental jewelry popular in hip-hop culture), and texts from his cell phone to claim he had a violent nature and that there was an effort to keep this information from the public.<sup>[27]</sup> His email and Facebook accounts were hacked by a white supremacist and selected tweets from his Twitter account were published on the conservative website *The Daily Caller*. A picture of Martin making an obscene gesture from his account was widely circulated, while pictures from the account of Martin with a birthday cake, fishing with his father and dressed in a prom suit were not.<sup>[28]</sup> The website *Gawker* obtained a screen shot of Martin's email account inbox before it was deleted, showing emails referring to SAT exams and scholarship opportunities.<sup>[29]</sup> During Zimmerman's trial, the judge granted defense lawyers access to Martin's cell phone, social media posts, and Facebook and Twitter accounts, saying that the defense team needed to be able to review the evidence for any indications of violent tendencies.<sup>[30][31]</sup> Some of the cell phone texts the defense wanted to use showed Martin had texted about his fights, marijuana use, and guns, and that he had described himself as "gangsta". Benjamin Crump, the Martin's family attorney, said whether Martin had worn gold teeth or used an obscene gesture had nothing to do with his death.<sup>[32][33][Note 4]</sup> The judge eventually ruled that Martin's social media posts would not be mentioned during the trial, although his marijuana use could be.<sup>[34]</sup> The defense did not present any of this information to the jury, and it was not entered into evidence.

Friends of Martin who had known him from Highland Oaks Middle School and Carol City High School and corresponded with him over Twitter, said Martin was not prone to violence. One friend said he was the "walk away" type of guy: "he'd rather walk away than fight." She also said that she had never seen Martin's purported grills, and did not know he had them until she saw the picture on the news, and she never saw him in public with them on. Another friend from Twitter who had known him since middle school said he was funny and had liked to joke around and make people laugh. A professor of media law at the University of Florida, Lyrisa Lidsky, said Martin's social media posts should be taken with a grain of salt, because they do not necessarily reflect what a teenager was like in person. She said a person's online persona may

not reflect a true image of who they are, especially with young people. University of Florida criminal law professor Kenneth Nunn said when he was concerned about a person's character, he would look at anything, including what Martin's behavioral traits have been, or may have been over time.<sup>[4]</sup>

At a banquet for Associated Press Broadcasters in Florida, Benjamin Crump and Mark O'Mara, Zimmerman's defense attorney, both said the role that social media played immediately following Martin's death set a precedent. Crump said that social media had given people who normally would not have a voice in matters like this a chance to engage in the case. O'Mara said the misinformation that was tweeted following Martin's death "caused a firestorm that wasn't a full picture."<sup>[35][36]</sup>

## 2 The shooting

Main article: Shooting of Trayvon Martin

Tracy Martin said he took his son to Sanford "to disconnect and get his priorities straight."<sup>[11]</sup> Martin had been to Twin Lakes several times before with his father, and sometimes played football with the kids in the neighborhood.<sup>[37][38][39]</sup> On the night of the shooting, Tracy was out to dinner with his fiancée, Brandy Green, while Trayvon and Green's son stayed at home, watching TV and playing video games. Trayvon went out, walking to a local 7-11 store where he bought Skittles for Green's son and an Arizona-brand watermelon-flavored fruit juice drink.<sup>[5][40][41][42][43][44]</sup>

After returning from the store to the Twin Lakes neighborhood, George Zimmerman, a volunteer Neighborhood Watch person, spotted Martin, who was 5 ft 11 in (1.80 m) tall and weighed 158 pounds (72 kg) at the time of his death.<sup>[7]</sup> Zimmerman called Sanford police to report Martin, who he said appeared "suspicious". Moments later, there was an altercation between the two individuals in which Zimmerman shot Martin, killing him. Zimmerman claimed self-defense and was eventually charged in Martin's death. On June 10, 2013, Zimmerman's trial began in Sanford and on July 13, a jury acquitted him of second-degree murder and of manslaughter charges.<sup>[45][46][47]</sup>

## 3 Aftermath and media discourse

### 3.1 2012

Martin's parents, upset that an arrest had not been made in their son's death, contacted Martin's sister-in-law, an attorney who put them in touch with Benjamin Crump, a civil rights attorney from Tallahassee, Florida. Crump took their case pro bono and retained Natalie Jackson,



an attorney familiar with Sanford and Seminole County who specialized in women's and children's cases, to help with the Martin case. On March 5, Jackson asked Ryan Julison to help as well. A publicist, Julison initially approached several national media contacts about covering the shooting. Over the next few days and weeks, the national media started reporting on the shooting, including: Reuters, CBS This Morning, ABC World News and CNN.<sup>[41][48][49][50]</sup> The *Miami Herald* reported that in the 30 days following the shooting, the name "Trayvon" was tweeted more than two million times.<sup>[5]</sup>

On March 8, Kevin Cunningham, a social media coordinator who had read about Martin's death, created a petition on Change.org which became the largest in the website's history a few weeks later with 2.2 million signatures. Cunningham said he started the online petition demanding that authorities prosecute Zimmerman and when the number of signatures reached 10,000, he transferred the petition to Martin's parents after Change.org contacted him. Cunningham was the media coordinator for KinderUSA, and said he fell in love with social media during the Egyptian revolution and was inspired by the death of Khaled Said. He thought Martin's death could be a similar situation where the death of one person could trigger a reevaluation of society, and revolutionize the justice system and the culture.<sup>[6]</sup>



Photo from the 'Million Hoodie March' in Union Square

After the death of Martin, the media focus on the case was instrumental in developing a national debate about racial profiling and self-defense laws, with marches and rallies held across the United States.<sup>[51]</sup> One of the larger rallies, called the "Million Hoodie March" was held in Manhattan's Union Square in New York City on March 21. People wore hoodies to symbolize their support for Martin, and against profiling used against non-white youths in hoodies. According to *Salon*, close to five thousand people attended the March, while other media outlet's estimated the supporters to be in the hundreds.<sup>[52][53]</sup> Martin's parents spoke at the event and many of the participants at the event were Occupiers who had been evicted the night before from Union Square and returned for the March.<sup>[1][54]</sup>

At a White House press conference in March, President

Obama was asked about the Martin shooting, and said, "If I had a son he would look like Trayvon and I think they [his parents] are right to expect that all of us as Americans are going to take this with the seriousness it deserves." Mitt Romney, the Republican presidential candidate at the time, said that a full inquiry was needed so that "justice could be carried out with impartiality and integrity".<sup>[55]</sup> The Project for Excellence in Journalism reported in March that media coverage of the Martin case had become the first news story in 2012 to be reported on more than the presidential race.<sup>[3]</sup>

In June, Martin's parents and members of the Second Chance on Shoot First campaign, delivered a petition with 340,000 signatures to the Citizen Safety and Protection task force asking for changes to the Stand-your-ground law in Florida. Governor Rick Scott had established the task force after Martin's death to review and make recommendations about the law. Florida was the first state to pass a law that allowed an individual who feels threatened to stand his or her ground.<sup>[2][56]</sup> Joëlle Anne Moreno, a former federal prosecutor, who was part of the task force said it was "clear that there was lots of confusion around the statute." Marion Hammer, a National Rifle Association (NRA) lobbyist and former NRA president who had helped write Florida's law, said the law was not about one incident and there was nothing wrong with the law.<sup>[57]</sup> The task force eventually recommended against repealing the statute, saying that Florida residents had a right to defend themselves with deadly force without a duty to retreat if they feel threatened.<sup>[58]</sup> [Note 5]

Stand-your-ground laws were not used as a legal defense in the trial of George Zimmerman and had no legal role in his eventual acquittal.<sup>[59][60][61]</sup>

### 3.2 2013

In an interview with *New York Times* columnist Charles Blow in June, Martin's mother was asked about the texts recovered from her son's cell phone, which "appeared to show a boy who used marijuana, was involved in fights and had a handgun". She said that she was skeptical about the truthfulness of those claims and didn't know if they were real or not. She just wanted the world to remember him "as just an average teenager, somebody that was struggling through life, but nevertheless had a life."<sup>[62]</sup>

Politicians, celebrities, musicians, civil rights leaders and citizens all expressed their opinions on every form of media following the acquittal of Zimmerman.<sup>[63]</sup> Four days after the acquittal, a group calling themselves the Dream Defenders, began a sit-in at the Florida State Capitol to force a special legislative session on Florida's stand your ground law. After 31 days, their occupation of the Capitol ended without a special session being called.<sup>[64]</sup> A group of Martin supporters walked from Jacksonville, Florida to Sanford to highlight what they believed were

injustices concerning Florida's stand your ground law. The six day walk was called the "Walk for Dignity," and ended with a community forum being held and a dedication of the Trayvon Martin memorial at the Goldsboro Westside Historical Museum, in Sanford.<sup>[13]</sup> In Los Angeles, California an area of a garden at Crenshaw High School was dedicated to Martin in celebration of the 50th anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s I Have a Dream speech. A march was also held at the dedication to teach students how to express their First Amendment rights while standing their ground for youth Civil Rights, according to the school.<sup>[65]</sup>



President Obama speaking in July 2013 about Trayvon Martin<sup>[Note 6]</sup>

In July, President Obama made comments about the death of Martin after the acquittal of Zimmerman. He said, "I think it would be useful for us to examine some state and local laws to see ... if they are designed in such a way that they may encourage the kinds of altercations and confrontations and tragedies that we saw in the Florida case, rather than defuse potential altercations." The President also talked about his experiences of being an African-American man in this country and a history of racial disparities in the law and how it's applied to the African-American community, in everything from the death penalty to drug laws. The President said it was those experiences that had an impact on how the African-American community interpreted what happened that night in Florida. It was during these remarks when President Obama said, "Trayvon Martin could have been me 35 years ago."<sup>[66][67]</sup>

### 3.3 2014 and later

On July 19, 2014, Crenshaw High School in Los Angeles was scheduled to hold a "peace walk and peace talk" hosted by Trayvon Martin's parents, Sybrina Fulton and Tracy Martin.<sup>[68]</sup>

## 4 See also

- 2014 Ferguson unrest
- Death of Kendrick Johnson

- Disappearance of Terrance Williams and Felipe Santos
- Racism in the United States

## 5 Notes

- [1] Alicia Stanley's interview aired on June 28, 2012
  - \* Video of Stanley's interview on AC360°
  - \* Transcript of Stanley's interview on AC360°
- [2] <sup>[4]</sup> The Miami Herald verified the account was Trayvon Martin's by cross-referencing tweets (Twitter posts) from Martin's account with those of people mentioned throughout his tweets.
- [3] Screenshot of Martin's nickname "Slimm" and Twitter handle, NO\_LIMIT\_NIGGA from Twitpic
- [4] Transcript of Martin's cell phone texts from November, 2011 to February, 2012.
- [5] Second Chance on Shoot First is a coalition that includes New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, the NAACP and the National Urban League.<sup>[2]</sup>
  - \* Final report and other documents from the Task Force on Citizens Safety and Protection
- [6] Transcript of President Obama's Remarks
  - \* Remarks by the President on Trayvon Martin
  - Video of President Obama's Remarks
  - \* President Obama Speaks on Trayvon Martin

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## 7 External links

- Justice for Trayvon website maintained by GlobalGrind.com
- Trayvon Martin collected news and commentary at *The New York Times*
- Trayvon Martin collected news and commentary at *The Wall Street Journal*
- Trayvon Martin collected news and commentary at *Orlando Sentinel*
- Trayvon Martin collected news and commentary at *ABC News*
- Trayvon Martin collected news and commentary at *TIME*
- 'Million Hoodies March' collection of 15 photographs at Flickr
- 'Million Hoodies March' collection of 20 photographs at Flickr
- Trayvon Benjamin Martin at *Find a Grave*



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