

From the Editor

Ready for another twelve hundred words on the George Zimmerman case?

Yeah, me neither.

But I do have a couple of thoughts to share, and then maybe we can all move on. For better or worse, this case has a number of lessons and implications for gunowners.

In hindsight, it is interesting to me that one case can capture the media's attention, and therefore everyone else's, either because they become engrossed in it or because people are effectively held hostage to whatever "Big Story" the media decides.

Most people are just not as keenly interested as the cadre of professional "experts," show hosts, and assorted politicians and freelance demagogues eager for any face time. But with the media's new found inability to focus on more than one item at a time, everyone else is just stuck with the Big Story, complete with portentous theme music.

A check of most major daily newspapers will net at minimum, a story a week that could fit the rough outline of the Zimmerman case, but pre-Zimmerman, would not get much attention beyond a little play on local talk radio and a follow up news story when the district attorney or the grand jury decides not to proceed with the case.

It's important to remember that, originally, the police

declined to charge George Zimmerman for shooting and killing Trayvon Martin on the night of Feb 26, 2012, in Sanford, FL. That cost the chief of police his job. The case was turned over to the State Attorney, who announces on Mar. 20 that a grand jury would be empanelled for the case. By Apr. 9, the state attorney, in charge of the case, Angela Corey, said that there will be no grand jury and on Apr. 11 she announced that Zimmerman will be charged with second degree murder.

In the six weeks between the shooting and the filing of the charges against Zimmerman, friends and family of both Martin and Zimmerman grant interviews. Several rallies are held in and around Sanford to press for an indictment. The director Spike Lee tweets Zimmerman's address, only to have to retract since he tweeted the wrong address. Florida's Republican governor, Rick Perry, announces a task force to study the state's "Stand Your Ground Law." The President of the United States weighs in publicly on the case, saying the nation should do some "soul searching to figure out how something like this happens."

Also in this time period, both the FBI and Justice Department say they are opening investigations into the case. Martin's family press

for an indictment and ask the police to release the 911 tapes of the incident, which they do on Mar. 16. Partial video begins appearing of Zimmerman in police custody the night of the shooting.

Zimmerman makes his first appearance in court the next day and on Apr. 23 is out on a \$150,000 bond, and fitted with a GPS monitoring device.

On May 17, police release 183 pages of documents relating to the case, together with audio and video of Martin at the 7-11 the night of the shooting. A few days later, they release video of Zimmerman at the Sanford police station three days after the shooting.

In June, the bond is revoked after prosecutors argue that Zimmerman had more money than previously disclosed. Just under a month later, Zimmerman is again released, this time on a million dollar bond. Zimmerman does his first interview, with Fox's Sean Hannity.

August is filled with legal maneuvers on both sides, including a defense request—later granted—that the original judge be recused.

In Nov., Gov. Perry's Task Force recommends that there be no sweeping changes in the state's "Stand Your Ground law."

To mark the anniversary of the shooting in February of this

year, rallies are held in Florida and Martin's parents attend one in New York City.

On June 20, a jury of six women are selected. The media reports that 5 of the women are white, five are married with children and two had recently moved to Florida from the Midwest. Florida law requires a jury of 12 only in capital cases. Four alternates are also chosen. Jury selection takes nine days.

On June 24 the trial opens, and on July 12 the case is sent to the jury, who have heard all the testimony and received a 27-page jury instruction, approved by the judge, prosecution and defense.

The next day, the jury brings back a Not Guilty verdict.

During the trial, the media continues its fascination with the case—most of the cable news outlets now have nightly “Zimmerman Trial” programs, which show footage of the trial and parse meanings with panels of experts. The verdict brings more media and concerns about potential violence, which is mostly ungrounded, despite increasingly hot rhetoric.

The first of the jury members is interviewed on television, saying that they did not think the prosecution proved the 2nd degree murder charge. A second juror reveals that the jury was initially split, but came to agree the state did not prove its charges.

What about those lessons and implications I mentioned

earlier?

Well, chief among them should be that, unlike one hour television shows, trials are long drawn out affairs. It was 18 months between the shooting and Zimmerman's acquittal. They are also a lot more complicated than people not involved in the “law and order” process realize. And the process is grueling—taking a toll on finances and family, as well as the defendant.

While I tried not to watch too much television coverage of either the trial or its aftermath, it was impossible to avoid completely.

One night on MSNBC, host Lawrence O'Donnell sniffed about “the quality” of the jurors and rethinking universal service, clearly implying that a jury of television pundits would have come to a different verdict. Perhaps the pundit jury wouldn't have paid attention to all the instructions to be impartial, perhaps they would not have paid attention to the actual witnesses—in full, and not just in clips, perhaps they wouldn't have paid attention to the summations by defense and prosecution, and perhaps, as well, they wouldn't have paid attention to the 27-pages of jury instructions.

As we have seen in various trials of the century for the last 20 years or so, juries often act differently than anticipated,

sometimes shockingly so, but the jury system works precisely because of that, and no amount of “shoulda-coulda-woulda” by people who did not put the same effort as the jury in, should question it.

The hue and cry about the Zimmerman case has largely settled down—even the President and Attorney General who seemed unable to resist the spotlight in the immediate aftermath of the verdict have gone silent. Singer Stevie Wonder who announced he would boycott the state of Florida until it repealed its “Stand Your Ground” law, was met with mostly shrugs, as was a moveon.org online drive to encourage a similar boycott by conventioners.

That the “Stand Your Ground” law was never an issue in the trial—the defense waived its claim to a hearing on it—seems to have been lost on the pundits and celebrities and activists.

It's really too bad that the stated intention of the media—illumination and the stated intention of activists—justice—were lost in this case.

It's too bad, but it's not too surprising.



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